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Change Over Time

Unit A2 1

Option 5: Clash of Ideologies in Europe 1900-2000

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Introduction

This option starts with a brief introduction to Tsarist foreign policy between 1900 and 1917. Students focus on the relationship between Communist Russia and neighbouring Western governments in Europe from the October Revolution of 1917 to the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Students examine the motives, aims and methods of governments in foreign affairs, focusing on factors that influenced their decisions and actions, including the role of ideology, pragmatism, economic considerations, aggression and defence. In studying Soviet foreign policy and that of rival governments, students analyse the themes of success and failure. They also study the role of key individuals and assess significant turning points.

This option is assessed in a one hour written examination. Candidates respond to a synoptic essay question analysing the period as a whole. They answer one question from a choice of two. The synoptic essay tests the candidate's ability to assess change and/or development over a period of approximately 100 years to demonstrate understanding of the process of historical change.

The synoptic essay question tests **Assessment Objective A01**: the candidate's ability to demonstrate, organise and communicate knowledge and understanding to analyse and evaluate the key features related to the periods studied, making substantiated judgements and exploring concepts, as relevant, of cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance.

For ease of consultation, the following study is divided into five sections:

1. Revolutionary Russia and opposition from Western governments 1917-1933.
2. The struggle for survival 1933-1945.
3. The search for security 1945-1956.
4. Co-operation and coexistence 1956-1979.
5. Soviet aggression, decline and collapse 1979-1991.



1. Revolutionary Russia and opposition from Western governments 1917-1933

A. The foreign policies of Soviet Russia and Western governments 1917-1924

(i) Lenin's foreign policy 1917-1924: aims, motives and methods

Lenin's foreign policy between 1917 and 1924 was determined by a number of different aims and motives, the relative importance of which changed during this period. The aims of Soviet foreign policy often appeared to be contradictory, especially in the period up to 1921 when the Bolshevik government was attempting to export revolution abroad at a time when it was also deeply concerned about its own survival. Lenin's foreign policy was shaped by four aims:

(a) To spread Communism in Europe

In the immediate aftermath of the October 1917 Revolution, ideological considerations played a key role in the foreign policy of the Bolshevik government. Its most important foreign policy aim at this stage was to promote worldwide revolution. Lenin maintained that, if a Communist government could be successfully established in Russia, an economically backward country, it should encourage the outbreak of Communist uprisings in more advanced Capitalist countries. For the leaders of the Bolshevik regime, this was of critical importance, since they believed, to quote Trotsky, that 'either the Russian Revolution will create a revolutionary movement in Europe, or the European powers will destroy the Russian Revolution'. In order to organise Communist revolutions internationally, Lenin founded the Comintern in Moscow in March 1919 under the leadership of Grigori Zinoviev. However, it experienced little tangible success. Its support for Bela Kula's attempt to set up a Soviet Republic in Hungary ultimately failed, as did the Spartacist Rising in Berlin in January 1919. Similarly, a Soviet Republic briefly seized power in Bavaria in the spring of 1919 but its success was equally short-lived.

The aim of exporting revolution was also evident in the Russo-Polish War when Red Army troops came very close to capturing Warsaw in August 1920. According to Lenin, Poland, in view of its strategic geographical position between Germany and Russia, represented the 'red bridge' the Bolsheviks had to cross in order to spread Communist revolution into Western Europe. The Red Army's defeat by Polish troops marked a change in the foreign policy of the Bolshevik regime. Although the Comintern continued to operate behind the scenes and became dominated by Soviet Russia, the plan of exporting the revolution took a back seat in favour of coexistence with capitalist Western governments. In fact, it was no coincidence that, in the same week in March 1921 as Soviet Russia concluded peace with Poland in the Treaty of Riga, Lenin announced a fundamental change in Bolshevik economic policy by introducing the New Economic Policy at the expense of War Communism.

(b) Economic considerations

Economic factors also influenced Soviet foreign policy in the period 1917-1924. For example, Lenin's decision to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, in spite of its extremely harsh terms, was partly due to the serious financial predicament in which Soviet Russia found itself. Lenin also recognised from 1920 onwards that, in spite of



ideological differences, it was in Soviet Russia's economic interests to establish trade links with Western governments. In 1921 it concluded a trade agreement with Britain which was consolidated in 1924 by an Anglo-Soviet General Treaty and Commercial Agreement. Economic co-operation also formed part of the Treaty of Rapallo, concluded between the Soviet Union and Germany, the two pariah states, in April 1922, following the breakdown of the World Economic Conference in Genoa. According to the terms of the Rapallo Treaty, both countries would abandon financial claims against each other dating back to the First World War and establish closer economic relations. It was also agreed that Germany would help to promote industrialisation in the Soviet Union.

**Web Audio**

Listen to a summary of the significance of the Treaty of Rapallo at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbM2Te_Be9s

(c) To gain international recognition

However, Soviet Russia's trade agreements with Britain and Germany in the early 1920s were not solely motivated by economic considerations but also aimed to secure international recognition. After all, Soviet Russia was diplomatically isolated in 1920-1921, having been excluded from the Paris peace talks and refused admission to the League of Nations. While the main focus of Soviet foreign policy in the period directly after the Revolution had been to bring about world revolution, the emphasis by the early 1920s was on peaceful coexistence with capitalist countries in order to gain diplomatic recognition. For example, Lenin attached great importance to the presence of a Soviet delegation under Georgy Chicherin at the Genoa Conference because it represented an important step towards the re-integration of Soviet Russia into the international community. The Soviet delegation also took great care to wear conventional diplomatic dress in order to create a good impression. Similarly, Lenin considered the economic benefits from Soviet Russia's trade agreements with Britain in 1921 and 1924 to be less important than the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1924. Similarly, the economic gains the Soviet Union derived from the Treaty of Rapallo were of secondary importance to Germany becoming the first capitalist state to set up diplomatic relations with the new regime in Moscow.

(d) Security considerations

Security considerations also exerted an important influence on the foreign policy of Soviet Russia, especially in the period up to 1922. As the only Communist regime in Europe, surrounded by ideologically hostile states, the Bolsheviks were understandably concerned about the survival of the new regime. These fears were exacerbated by a series of events between 1918 and 1922:

1. Since the Bolsheviks had gained power with a promise to withdraw Soviet Russia from the First World War, they concluded an armistice with Germany in December 1917, much to the dismay of their allies, France and Britain. This decision also provoked controversy at home, where Bukharin led a group who wanted to continue fighting. Confronted by opposition at home and abroad, security and survival represented the key aims of the Bolsheviks.
2. Following slow and fractious peace talks, held against a background of Bolshevik efforts to incite unrest among Germany's disillusioned armed forces, Bolshevik Russia and Germany eventually signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918. For the new Bolshevik regime, the terms were very punitive. It suffered heavy territorial



losses, including the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and the Ukraine, Russia's most important grain producing area. The area Soviet Russia was forced to give up contained 62 million people, some 16 per cent of its total population. Lenin's decision to sign the Treaty prompted considerable disagreement among the Bolsheviks and was approved by just a single vote at the Party's Central Committee. In this situation, the Bolshevik regime's overriding policy consideration was its own survival.

3. However, the most potent threat to the survival of the Bolshevik regime was the Russian Civil War (1918-1921). Although the Reds ultimately prevailed, numerous disaffected groups in Soviet Russia were represented in the Whites' forces, supported by many foreign armies. The Bolsheviks paid a heavy price for their success and the war had a devastating impact on the economy of Soviet Russia. Industrial output in 1921 was only 31 per cent of that in 1913, while exports in 1921 totalled only 1 per cent of the pre-war figure. The year 1921 also witnessed a national famine. In addition, the First World War and the Civil War had inevitably taken a heavy toll on the Red Army, while Soviet Russia was surrounded on all sides by hostile states. Thus, it is unsurprising that the main aim of the Bolshevik regime in 1921 was survival.



Web Article

For an article in History Today to mark the hundredth anniversary of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, see:

<https://www.historytoday.com/richard-cavendish/treaty-brest-litovsk>

(ii) Western governments and the Soviet Union 1917-1924: aims, motives and methods

The policies of Western governments towards the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1924 were influenced by a number of different motives and aims. Generally speaking, the Western powers adopted a more aggressive policy towards Soviet Russia in the early post-war years but from 1921 onwards they were more prepared to seek an accommodation with the Bolshevik regime. It should also be pointed out there was no common response from the Western powers to the Bolsheviks in the period 1917-1924 and, in particular, there were significant differences between the attitude of Britain and Germany. The United States followed a policy of isolationism and had little involvement in European affairs during this period. The foreign policies of the Western governments were determined by three main aims:

(a) Security considerations

There is no doubt that Western governments were deeply alarmed about the rise of the Bolsheviks. Their initial response to the perceived threat of Bolshevism was aggressive, epitomised by Churchill's famous quip that the Soviet Union should be 'strangled in the crib'. The fears Western politicians harboured about the Bolshevik regime were largely based on ideological considerations:

1. They were apprehensive about a regime which made no secret of its aim to spread Communist ideas throughout the world by using force. The growing disquiet in Paris and London was reinforced by the establishment of the Comintern in 1919 with its avowed aim of promoting global revolution.



2. Leading Western politicians expressed disquiet that Communism would prove attractive to the working classes in capitalist countries, especially in the poor economic conditions prevailing after the First World War. Significantly, the French Communist Party was founded in 1920, while its counterpart in Germany polled 12.6 per cent at the General Election held in May 1924.
3. Western political elites were concerned that the spread of Communism would adversely affect world trade, especially since, according to Marxist theory, Communist countries should strive for self-sufficiency.

These security fears prompted the Western governments to intervene in Soviet Russia in the spring of 1918. When Tsar Nicholas II abdicated, the allies feared that the new regime would withdraw from the First World War, thus allowing the Germans to concentrate all their forces on the Western front. To prevent this danger, the allies successfully offered the Provisional Government substantial financial aid to continue the war. However, the Bolsheviks withdrew from the conflict when they came to power and in March 1918 concluded the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany, an action its allies regarded as a betrayal. In order to ensure that the war materials they had supplied to Soviet Russia were not seized by the Germans, some 30,000 French, American and, above all, British forces took control of the ports of Murmansk and Archangel in the spring of 1918.

The troop landings saw the start of foreign intervention in Soviet Russia between 1918 and 1921. In fact, foreign forces remained on Russian soil even after the conclusion of the First World War, fighting for the Whites against the Reds in the Civil War. They included British troops in the south of Russia and French forces in Odessa, as well as soldiers from countries seeking independence from Soviet Russia, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Rumania. The allies also provided the Whites with war materials, including 100,000 rifles from Britain and 200,000 from the United States. However, the Western forces contributed little to the fighting and their efforts were not effectively co-ordinated, shortcomings which contributed to the defeat of the Whites. By late-1920 all the Western forces had been recalled. In short, the intervention of Western governments in the Civil War was half-hearted and did not represent a determined effort to topple the Bolshevik regime.

(b) Economic considerations

Economic factors also influenced the policies of Western governments to the Bolshevik regime. For example, a decisive influence on French support for intervention in Soviet Russia following the Revolution of October 1917 was the Bolsheviks' decision not to honour the debts of the Tsarist regime and to freeze foreign capital invested in Russia. This same issue was a key reason for the collapse of the World Economic Conference held in Genoa in April 1922. Nonetheless, the conclusion of the Russian Civil War in 1921 signalled a change in the attitude of Western governments to the Bolsheviks since they recognised that the new regime was likely to survive. As a result, both Britain and France displayed a willingness to reach trade agreements with Soviet Russia. For example, Eduard Herriot, a politician and economist who later became Prime Minister of France, supported Franco-Soviet economic co-operation following a visit to the Soviet Union in the autumn of 1922. Meanwhile, Britain and Soviet Russia signed the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement in 1921, while an Anglo-Soviet General Treaty and Commercial Agreement was concluded in 1924.

According to this agreement, Britain pledged to loan the Soviet Union £30 million, while the Soviet Union would compensate Britain for the businesses the Bolsheviks seized during the October Revolution. However, the House of Commons did not ratify the agreement because the Labour Party lost the general election held in October 1924 and



the Conservatives came to power. Germany also sought closer economic relations with the Soviet Union and this formed an integral part of the Treaty of Rapallo which stated that they would 'co-operate in meeting the economic needs of both countries'.

The examples of France, Britain and Germany indicate that from 1921 onwards economic considerations and self-interest exerted a greater influence on national policies than ideological differences.

(c) Diplomatic isolation

When it became clear by 1921 that the attempt to topple the Bolshevik regime had failed, Western governments continued their policy of isolating Soviet Russia diplomatically. Thus, while Soviet Russia regarded trade agreements with Britain and Germany as a stepping stone to gaining international recognition, the 'European powers', to quote Alastair Kocho-Williams, 'did not see the link between trade and diplomacy in quite the same way as the Soviets'. Despite the economic agreements signed in 1921 and 1924 between Britain and Soviet Russia, British diplomats and politicians remained deeply suspicious of the fledgling Bolshevik state. Their distrust was mainly based on the activities of the Comintern and culminated in the Curzon Ultimatum, issued on 29 May 1923. The ultimatum warned the Soviet Union to halt its propaganda campaign against Britain, accusing it of breaking the terms of the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement. Relations between Britain and Russia improved briefly when a minority Labour government under Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald came to power in January 1924. In fact, Britain became one of the first states to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in February 1924. However, relations deteriorated sharply as a result of the Zinoviev Letter, published in October 1924. It was a forgery and had the intention of damaging the Labour Party's prospects in the general election just four days later. The letter, supposedly written by Grigori Zinoviev, head of the Comintern, appealed to the British Communist Party to infiltrate the Labour Party and make preparations for a coup to topple the British government and replace it with a Communist regime. The letter contributed to the Labour Party's defeat in the election and, as noted above, the incoming Conservative Government under Stanley Baldwin did not ratify the Anglo-Soviet General Treaty and Commercial Agreement.



Web Audio

For a discussion of the significance of the Zinoviev letter, listen to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaMJsKabD5Y>

(iii) How successful was the policy of the Western governments towards the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1924?

1. The fears of Western governments that Communist uprisings would break out in Western Europe in the early post-war years did not materialise, though there is ample scope for debate about the extent to which it was the policies of Western governments which averted this danger.
2. The involvement of the allies in the Russian Civil War was a failure. Their intervention was weak, unenthusiastic and uncoordinated. In fact, Norman Davies observed that the 'allied intervention in Russia had shown that the West possessed neither the will nor the resources to control the Bolsheviks'.



3. Similarly, the Rapallo Treaty showed the impotence of Western democratic governments when Germany and the Soviet Union, the two 'rogue states' of Europe, angry at attempts to make them pay back their wartime debts in the case of the Soviet Union and reparations in the case of Germany, slipped away from the Genoa Conference to conclude an economic agreement.
4. There was no unified, common response among the Western powers to Soviet Russia in the period 1917-1924. The United States withdrew from Europe, while the major European powers each pursued their own narrow policy interests. This was vividly illustrated by the Rapallo Treaty. There were also internal divisions in Britain and France about how to respond to the October Revolution and its aftermath. For example, in Britain some politicians advocated a more aggressive intervention in the Civil War but encountered fierce opposition from trade unionists and socialists.

B. The foreign policies of Soviet and Western governments 1924-1933

Lenin's death in 1924 saw the gradual emergence of Stalin as party leader. It is often justifiably pointed out that under his leadership Soviet foreign policy from 1924 onwards became more inward-looking but it should also be borne in mind that his policies exhibited continuity as well as change. Another feature of Soviet foreign policy between 1924 and 1933 was that its priorities changed during this period in response to internal and external events.

(i) Soviet foreign policy 1924-1933: aims, motives and methods

(a) To export the revolution?

The years 1924-1925 witnessed a bitter ideological clash between Trotsky and Stalin on the future of the revolution. Trotsky believed in 'Permanent Revolution'. He argued that the gains of the October Revolution could only be preserved if revolutionary uprisings continuously took place in other countries. Therefore, he maintained, the Soviet Union should continue to export the revolution. Stalin took a diametrically opposite view. Continuing the more insular, inward-looking policies Lenin adopted from the early 1920s, he put forward a policy of 'Socialism in one country'. For Stalin in 1924 the priority was not to export the Revolution of October 1917 but consolidate its gains by concentrating on the economic reconstruction of the Soviet Union.

Fluctuations in Stalin's foreign policy priorities between 1924 and 1933 are reflected in the changing role of the Comintern:

1. Stalin's focus on the consolidation rather than expansion of Communism was demonstrated in the reduced role the Comintern played between 1924 and 1928. Though he could never admit it in public, Stalin regarded the Comintern during this period as 'an unwelcome nuisance, a hangover from the failed dreams of achieving "permanent world revolution"' (Rowe and Waller). Nevertheless, the Comintern continued to operate abroad and was active in promoting the General Strike in Britain in May 1926. Following raids in May 1927 on the offices of the Soviet Trade Delegation in London and Arcos, which co-ordinated Anglo-Soviet Trade, the government in London concluded that they were conducting subversive activities against the British state. Later that month Britain broke off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.



2. While Stalin had focused on consolidating the gains of the revolution, the Soviet economy and his own position from 1924 to 1928, he adopted a more aggressive foreign policy at the end of the 1920s. In a speech to the Sixth Comintern Congress in the summer of 1928, Stalin declared that the capitalist system was in deep decline and the Comintern should seize the opportunity to lay the groundwork for the worldwide export of the revolution by launching an attack on the Social Democratic parties which were, he argued, allies of fascist groups in view of their willingness to work with capitalist parties. The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 reinforced Stalin's view that capitalism was on the verge of collapse. He initially adopted a relaxed stance to the rise of National Socialism in Germany, arguing that its electoral successes would be short-lived and would pave the way for a Communist revolution. The hope that these events in Germany would enable him to export the revolution may explain his slow response to Hitler's suppression of the German Communist Party in 1934.
3. At the same time, Stalin strengthened the Soviet Union's grip on the Comintern. While, in theory, it remained an international organisation, in reality it became a body run by and answerable to Moscow. The Soviet Union imposed more stringent control over the French, German and Italian Communist Parties which were systematically infiltrated by Soviet spies.

Thus, the years 1928-1929 witnessed a significant change in the direction of Soviet foreign policy.

(b) Security considerations

The low priority Stalin attributed in 1924 to exporting the revolution and his declaration in December of that year that the main focus of the state would be on 'Socialism in one Country' was based on his fears for the security of the Soviet Union. He believed that the Soviet state was encircled by hostile capitalist countries, asserting in 1925 that war would break out sooner or later. There was some justification for Stalin's claims about the hostility towards the Soviet Union. For example, shortly after Britain broke off diplomatic relations, the Soviet ambassador to Poland was shot dead in Warsaw in June 1927. Stalin was also alarmed at the Dawes Plan (1924) and the Locarno Treaty (1925) because he feared that they would promote greater economic and political stability in Western Europe, thus making an attack on the Soviet Union more probable. A confidential document drawn up in Moscow identified Britain, Poland, France and Italy as the states most likely to attack the Soviet Union. Although it is likely that Stalin exaggerated the external threats facing the Soviet Union to justify his harsh domestic policies, there is no doubt that his security concerns were genuine.

In order to counteract his security concerns, Stalin adopted a dual strategy:

1. In an attempt to safeguard the Soviet Union from what he regarded as the potential threats emanating from capitalist countries, the Soviet leader concentrated on economic reconstruction, and particularly rapid industrialisation, in order to increase rearmament levels. Stalin's belief that the security of the Soviet Union was heavily dependent on its economic reconstruction is nicely expressed in his observation that: 'We are 50 to 100 years behind the advanced nations of the West, we either make up the difference or be crushed'.
2. The Soviet Union attempted to sign non-aggression pacts with other powers. In particular, it tried to consolidate the 'special relationship' it had established with Germany in the Rapallo Treaty of 1922. In 1926 the Soviet Union and Germany



concluded the German-Soviet Friendship Treaty, the Berlin Treaty. Its main provision was that, if either the Soviet Union or Germany was attacked by another power, they would remain neutral. The Treaty was renewed in 1931. Further evidence of Stalin's fears for the security of the Soviet Union can be found in a series of non-aggression pacts he concluded with a number of countries in 1931-1932, including France in November 1932 and Poland in the following month.

(c) Economic considerations

As noted above, Stalin's most important policy objective when he came to power in 1924 was economic reconstruction at home. In order to achieve this aim, the Soviet Union required technology and technical expertise from the more economically advanced Western powers. As a result, Stalin sought to establish new economic agreements or consolidate existing trade agreements with Western governments. His greatest success was the Berlin Treaty of 1926. The economic articles of the Treaty included a mutual undertaking not to participate in any economic embargo imposed on the partner country. The Soviet Union also secured important economic gains from this Treaty. In fact, in June 1926 German banks made available to the USSR credits amounting to 300 million German marks. Trade between the two countries flourished and by 1931 Germany rated as the Soviet Union's most important trading partner. However, the Soviet Union's overtures to the other Western powers proved less productive. Britain broke off diplomatic relations with the USSR from 1927 to 1929, while the USA did not establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union until November 1933. However, despite this the American car manufacturer Henry Ford signed a contract with the Soviet Union in May 1929 to set up car production at Nizhny Novgorod.

To sum up, in the period 1924-1933 Stalin continued the inward-looking policies Lenin initiated in the concluding years of his rule and it is fair to conclude that his main focus was on the security of the Soviet Union.

(ii) Western governments and the Soviet Union 1924-1933: motives, aims and methods

The aims, motives and policies of Western governments towards the Soviet Union between 1924 and 1933 were very similar to the last three years of Lenin's rule. The Western powers acknowledged that they could not destroy the fledgling Soviet state but nonetheless remained suspicious of it and sought to isolate it diplomatically. As in the period 1917-1924, the West had no common policy towards the Soviet Union because the 'special relationship', established between the Soviet Union and Germany in the Treaty of Rapallo, continued from 1924 until the early 1930s. However, while the policy of Western governments in the period 1924-1933 was, in general, characterised by continuity, there were also elements of change:

1. German-Soviet relations became less close with the rise to power of the Nazis in the early 1930s.
2. The threat posed by the rise of fascism in the early 1930s made Western democratic governments recognise the need for closer diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union.
3. The attitude of the British government towards the Soviet Union in the period 1924-1933 fluctuated depending on whether the Conservative or Labour Party was in power.



(a) Security considerations

Security considerations dominated the foreign policy of the Western powers to the Soviet Union in the period 1924-1933. With the exception of Germany, Western governments, though establishing diplomatic and economic ties with the Soviet Union, nevertheless continued to regard it with mistrust and suspicion:

1. Up until 1924 the Western powers had regarded Germany as the greatest threat to European peace. However, its harsh treatment by France and Belgium during the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 elicited considerable sympathy from the international community. In addition, British and American politicians feared that the economic crisis in Germany in 1923-1924 might lead to a Communist revolution. As a result, Britain, France and the United States drew up the Dawes Plan in April 1924 to restructure Germany's reparations payments. In addition, the USA agreed to loan Germany 800 million marks. But there was another motive for the Dawes Plan because, as Kat Kearey has argued, 'Germany was viewed by Britain and France as a potential bulwark against Russian aggression'. Thus, security was an important determinant of the policy of Western governments.
2. The Locarno Treaty and its consequences provide some evidence to support Stalin's view that the West was hostile to the USSR. Signed in December 1925, the Locarno Treaty was an international agreement between Britain, France, Germany, Belgium and Italy, the main provision of which was Germany's acceptance of its Western borders with France and Belgium. This agreement represented another step towards Germany's rehabilitation into the international community, as shown by its admission to the League of Nations in 1926. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was not invited to join the organisation until 1934.
3. On 28 May 1927 the Conservative government in Britain broke off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, claiming that it was conducting subversive activities on British soil. However, when a minority Labour government was returned to power in October 1929, diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union were restored.

In the early 1930s the hostility of Western governments to the Soviet Union lessened as it became clear that Germany represented a greater threat to European peace than the USSR. Western governments showed a greater willingness to foster diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union in order to establish a bulwark against Nazi Germany. For example, France signed a Non-Aggression Pact with the Soviet Union in November 1932. Moreover, the United States became the last major Western power to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in November 1933 because of their mutual security concerns about Japan.

(b) Economic factors

In the period 1924-1933 Germany was the Western country which placed the greatest importance on its commercial and economic relations with the Soviet Union. For almost all of this period there were no formal diplomatic relations between the USA and the USSR. In the case of Britain, trade links continued but were hampered by the often poor political relations between the two countries.

(c) Germany and the Soviet Union

Germany's relationship with the Soviet Union was quite different from that of the other Western governments. For both of these 'pariah' states, the need to secure an ally was more important than the huge gulf in their ideological views. The 'special relationship' forged in the Treaty of Rapallo was reinforced by the German-Soviet Economic Agreement



in October 1925 and, in particular, the Treaty of Berlin in the following year. The mutual economic benefits for both countries have been discussed above but there were also secret clauses which led to close military co-operation between the two countries, especially in the period 1929-1932. As a result, the Soviet Union had the benefit of German military expertise and was able to draw up contracts with German armaments manufacturers. For Germany, the Treaty of Berlin enabled it to violate the Treaty of Versailles by constructing and testing military aircraft and tanks on Soviet soil, as well as co-operating on the production of poison gas weapons. From 1931 relations became less close as trade between the two countries began to decline and Stalin expressed disquiet about National Socialist policies.

2. The struggle for survival 1933-1945

A. The response of the Soviet Union and Western democratic governments to the rise of fascism in Germany, Italy and Spain 1933-1939

(i) Soviet foreign policy 1933-1939: aims, motives and methods

Soviet foreign policy between 1933 and 1939 was dominated by what Teddy Uldricks has described as a 'desperate search for security' in the face of the growing threat posed by Nazi Germany. But how the Soviet Union aimed to maintain its security during this period is a matter of debate among historians. The traditional view, put forward by AJP Taylor, is that the Soviet Union's main objective throughout the 1930s was to pursue a policy of 'collective security' by forming an alliance with Britain and France against Nazi Germany. According to this argument, Stalin only signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact with Hitler when he realised that the Western governments were unwilling to establish a triple alliance against Germany.

However, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, some Soviet historians have suggested an alternative interpretation, arguing that, far from being a radical departure from Soviet foreign policy in the interwar period, the Nazi-Soviet Pact was in fact the logical outcome of the policy the Soviet Union had been pursuing since concluding the Rapallo Agreement with Germany in 1922 and the German-Soviet Friendship Treaty (Berlin Treaty) in 1926. These different interpretations may reflect divisions within the Kremlin itself. The most prominent and influential supporter of the idea of 'collective security' with the West was Maxim Litvinov, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs in the Soviet Union from 1930 to 1939. The main advocate of Soviet rapprochement with Germany was Litvinov's bitter rival Vyacheslav Molotov, who replaced him as Foreign Minister in 1939, shortly before the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

Other historians, such as Robert Tucker, have argued that Stalin's attempts to establish defensive alliances with Britain, France and Germany between 1933 and 1939 were not motivated by security considerations but the hope that war between Germany and the Western powers would weaken them both to such an extent that the Soviet Union would be able to impose its will on the whole of Europe.



(a) What evidence is there to support the view that the Soviet Union favoured rapprochement with Germany from 1933 to 1939?

Despite Hitler's declaration that his long-term aim was the destruction of the Soviet Union and Lebensraum could only be acquired at its expense, Stalin nevertheless initially adopted a conciliatory stance towards Nazi Germany:

1. In May 1933 the Soviet Union and Germany approved an extension of the German-Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1926. The importance Stalin attached to security considerations is illustrated by his statement that co-operation between the Soviet Union and Germany was quite possible in spite of their ideological differences.
2. Close economic ties between the Soviet Union and Germany were maintained during the 1930s and on 20 March 1934 the two powers signed a trade agreement.
3. In the course of discussions about a new trade treaty with Germany, the Soviet negotiator, David Kandelaki, proposed in June 1935 that there should also be closer political co-operation with Nazi Germany, putting forward the idea that the two countries should sign a Non-Aggression Pact. He made the same proposal in 1936. However, Hitler did not respond positively to these overtures because, if he developed closer relations with the Soviet Union, it would undermine his argument that Germany represented Europe's bulwark against Communism. Nonetheless, discussions between the Soviet Union and Germany continued until February 1936 when the Franco-Soviet Treaty was approved by the French parliament.

(b) What evidence supports the view that the main aim of Soviet foreign policy from 1933 to 1939 was to achieve 'collective security' against Nazi Germany by seeking alliances with Britain and France?

Although the renewal of the German-Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1926 was approved in both Berlin and Moscow in 1933, Hitler did not respond as positively as Stalin had hoped to Soviet proposals for closer political relations between the two countries. The Soviet Union was also concerned at the Nazis' Non-Aggression Pact with Poland (January 1934). The Kremlin regarded Poland as a hostile state. These fears were exacerbated by the Axis Agreement between Italy and Germany (1936) and, above all, the Anti-Comintern Pact, an agreement between Germany, and Japan (1936) and later Italy which was explicitly aimed at the Soviet Union. These developments substantiated the view of Foreign Minister Litvinov that the only way to combat the threat posed by Nazi Germany was to follow a policy of 'collective security' by establishing closer relations with Western governments, in particular France. Thus, the Soviet Union was willing to form alliances with its ideological opponents in the interests of security. To quote Michael Lynch: 'Soviet foreign policy [during this period] was primarily concerned with finding allies to nullify the German danger'. The Soviet Union was also aware of potential economic benefits to be derived from closer ties with the West, especially the importation of Western technology.

This policy achieved some successes up to 1935:

1. In September 1934 the Soviet Union was admitted to the League of Nations, an organisation Lenin had once described as 'a den of robbers'.
2. On 2 May 1935 the Soviet Union signed a pact of mutual assistance with France. However, it should be noted that France's new right-wing government under Pierre Laval only signed the agreement reluctantly. Moreover, the security it provided was weak since it did not contain specific military agreements. In addition, it would only operate if France requested assistance.



3. Also in May 1935 the Soviet Union signed a similar pact of mutual assistance with Czechoslovakia. However, once again its significance was largely symbolic since it was unclear how the signatories would provide mutual military assistance since they did not share a border.

But from 1935 onwards the Soviet policy of 'collective security' was characterised by failure:

1. When, on 7 March 1936, German troops reoccupied the Rhineland, thus breaking the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of Locarno, the Soviet representative at the League of Nations, Maxim Litvinov, was the only delegate to demand sanctions against Nazi Germany. The British government declined to take any countermeasures because it had some sympathy with Germany on this issue, while the French government took no action since it was bitterly divided about its response.
2. In March 1938 German troops invaded Austria, incorporating it into the German Reich. Litvinov condemned Germany's action as 'an act of violence' but once again neither Britain nor France decided to intervene.
3. The Soviet Union was also very disappointed by the response of the Western governments to the crisis in Czechoslovakia in 1938. The pretext for Hitler's threat to invade was the alleged mistreatment of the 3 million Sudeten Germans living in Czechoslovakia. Litvinov made it clear that the Soviet Union would, in collaboration with other states, be prepared to go to war with Germany. He also declared that the Soviet Union would honour its commitment to Czechoslovakia as long as France did the same. In fact, at the height of the crisis in September 1938, the Soviet Union placed on standby 90 army units which were located on its Western border. However, neither Britain nor France showed any desire to stand up to Hitler at this point, suggesting to the Czechoslovakian leaders on 19 September that those parts of the Sudetenland with a majority of German speakers should be taken over by Germany. The Czechoslovakian government agreed with reluctance only for Hitler to increase his demands three days later. Against this background Britain, France and even Germany agreed to Mussolini's proposal to discuss the issue of Czechoslovakia in Munich on 29-30 September 1938.
4. The outcome of the meeting was the Munich Agreement between Britain, France, Germany and Italy. It was agreed that the Sudetenland should be handed over to Germany, while the independence of the remainder of Czechoslovakia would be guaranteed by the four powers. From the Soviet perspective, the most significant point was that it had not been invited to attend the meeting. Although Stalin had been the most consistent supporter of 'collective security' during the 1930s, the Western powers had, to quote Volkogonov, 'gathered without a thought for the Soviet Union'. They had excluded the Soviet Union from European diplomacy even though it was a member of the League of Nations and had signed mutual assistance agreements with both France and Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia itself was not invited to Munich Conference either, even though the meeting discussed the division of its territory.

The West's appeasement of Hitler at the Munich Conference represented a turning point in Soviet foreign policy because, in Stalin's eyes, it provided conclusive evidence that Britain and France would never engage with the Soviet Union in a policy of 'collective security' against Nazi Germany.



(c) The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War

The Spanish Civil War has its origins in a nationalist coup against the democratically elected Republican government in Madrid, the Popular Front. The fascist German and Italian governments supported the nationalists led by General Franco. In the absence of support from either of the leading Western 'democratic governments', Britain and France, the Republicans sought help from the Soviet Union. Although Stalin's involvement in the conflict was limited, he did, through the channels of the Comintern, provide some military equipment, including aircraft and tanks, as well as military personnel for the Republican cause.

There are a number of reasons for the Soviet Union's involvement in the Spanish Civil War:

1. It could be argued that fears for the security of the Soviet Union were of paramount importance for Stalin. He was concerned that a swift and convincing victory for the nationalists in Spain would provide a boost for international fascism and increase the likelihood of Nazi Germany attacking the Soviet Union. The limited help Stalin gave to the nationalist forces in Spain may also be attributed to security concerns because he did not want to jeopardise the Soviet Union's relations with Britain and France in his quest for 'collective security'.
2. Ideological considerations also influenced Stalin's decision to intervene since he was supporting a left-wing government against nationalist forces, supported by fascist governments.
3. Economic factors also helped to determine Stalin's intervention in the Spanish Civil War. The Soviet leader did not provide any military aid until he had received advance payment of gold to the value of 500 million dollars. The Republican government also dispatched a large quantity of raw materials to the Soviet Union.
4. The Soviet Union hoped to increase its international standing as a result of its intervention in the Spanish Civil War since it was the only country prepared to defend the democratically elected Spanish government in the face of the threat from fascism.
5. The war also gave the Soviet Union the opportunity to try out its new weapons, including planes and tanks.
6. Stalin also hoped that the Soviet Union's participation in the Spanish Civil War would distract attention from the purges he was carrying out at home.

(d) What was the impact of the Spanish Civil War on the relationship between the Soviet Union, Western governments and fascist regimes?

1. Although the Soviet Union ended up on the losing side, its intervention delayed the victory of the nationalists until March 1939 and it emerged from the conflict with increased prestige.
2. Stalin regarded the failure of Britain and France to intervene in the conflict as a further sign of their weakness and lack of resolve.
3. The successful outcome of the Spanish Civil War for the nationalists under Franco strengthened the relationship between Hitler and Mussolini.

**Web Audio**

Listen to a panel discussion, chaired by Melvyn Bragg, about the Spanish Civil War in the series *In Our Time* on BBC Radio 4, 3 April 2003 at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00548wn/broadcasts>

(ii) The foreign policy of Western democratic governments 1933-1939***(a) Western democratic governments and the Soviet Union***

The threat posed by the emergence in the 1930s of fascism in Italy, Spain and, in particular, Germany, brought about a change in the attitude of Western democratic governments to the Soviet Union. The hostility Western leaders had displayed towards it in the 1920s was replaced by a reluctant recognition that they would need to develop diplomatic ties with Stalin to counteract the fascist threat. This was reflected in the Soviet Union's entry into the League of Nations in September 1934 and the Franco-Soviet Treaty of May 1935. However, deep suspicion of Stalin remained in both London and Paris. This was illustrated by the omission of the Soviet Union from a Pact, signed by Britain, France, Germany and Italy in July 1933, pledging to maintain peace for ten years. Similarly, the Soviet Union was not invited to the Munich Conference in September 1938. When in March 1939 Britain and France eventually began to negotiate with the Soviet Union about a defensive alliance, they displayed little enthusiasm or urgency. Britain was not represented by either its Foreign Secretary or War Minister in the discussions and high-ranking military officers were also conspicuous by their absence. The British government's lack of commitment in July-August 1939 was especially surprising since public opinion in Britain was by this stage strongly in favour of an alliance with the Soviet Union.

(b) Why did the Western governments fail to co-operate effectively with the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany in the period 1933-1939?

1. Even after Hitler came to power in Germany, the political classes in both London and Paris continued to regard Communism as a greater threat than National Socialism. When the Soviet Union established the Comintern in 1919, its mandate was the 'overthrow of the international bourgeoisie'. Although its aim was changed in 1935 to combat fascism, the British and French governments remained suspicious of the Soviet Union for ideological reasons. The government in Paris believed that the Soviet Communists helped to instigate the industrial unrest which swept France in the mid-1930s.
2. Western governments were wary of forming alliances with the Soviet Union because of the tyrannical nature of its regime. During the period 1936-1938 Stalin carried out a series of Purges on a huge scale. According to one estimate, no fewer than 9 million people had been sent to labour camps by 1939. In addition, millions were murdered, including many in the political establishment, as well as political rivals and high-ranking army officers.
3. As a result of the huge scale of the purge of Red Army officers, the British and French governments harboured grave doubts by 1938 about the capacity of the Soviet Union's armed forces to fight successfully against Nazi Germany.
4. Western governments were suspicious of the Kremlin's motives for becoming involved in the Spanish Civil War and the ruling classes in both London and Paris expressed concern that Stalin was seeking to undermine Western democracies.



5. From 1933 to 1939 Britain and France pursued a policy of appeasement towards Germany. As Alan Bullock has pointed out, as late as August 1939 'the British and French were still thinking in terms of how to avoid war not how to win it'.

(c) The appeasement policy of Britain and France towards Nazi Germany

From 1935 until March 1939 Britain and France followed a policy of appeasement towards Nazi Germany – in other words, a policy of attempting to preserve peace in Europe by agreeing to make concessions to Hitler and complying with his demands. Britain took the lead in appeasing Nazi Germany, and the policy of appeasement is most closely associated with Neville Chamberlain, who served as British Prime Minister from May 1937 to May 1940. However, the first act of appeasement by Britain arguably dated back to mid-1935, when Stanley Baldwin was Prime Minister:

1. In June 1935 Britain and Germany signed the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. This agreement was controversial since it permitted Germany to produce a higher tonnage of ships than permitted under the Treaty of Versailles. This agreement, which was bitterly opposed by Italy and especially France, was significant because it violated both the Treaty of Versailles and the Stresa Front.
2. Encouraged by the weak reaction of Britain and France to Mussolini's attack on Abyssinia in October 1935, Hitler remilitarised the Rhineland in March 1936, breaking the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, as well as the Treaty of Locarno. While France appealed to Britain for support, Baldwin declined to take any action.
3. When German troops annexed Austria in March 1938, Britain and France confined their response to verbal protests to the German government.
4. The British and French response to Hitler's demand in September 1938 that Germany should take over the Sudetenland was weak. France did not honour the defensive alliance it had signed with Czechoslovakia in 1924, while Chamberlain held a series of meetings with Hitler in September 1938. The outcome of the Munich Conference held on 29-30 September represented a resounding victory for Hitler since it was agreed that the Sudetenland should be handed over to Germany. Chamberlain and Hitler pledged that their respective countries would never go to war and Chamberlain received a hero's welcome when he returned to London. In March 1939 Hitler broke his promise not to make any further territorial demands on a weakened Czechoslovakia. At this point, Chamberlain and Daladier acknowledged that their appeasement policy had failed. Norman Davies offered a damning verdict on Chamberlain's unsuccessful attempts to appease Hitler: 'Under pressure from the ruthless, the clueless combined with the spineless to achieve the worthless'.

(d) Why did Britain and France pursue a policy of appeasement towards Nazi Germany in the period 1933-1939?

1. Western democracies, including Britain and France, had been more severely affected by the Great Depression than the Soviet Union. Their economic weakness made them wary of making any foreign policy commitments which might lead to war.
2. Although Britain and France emerged as victors from the First World War, their colossal military expenditure between 1914 and 1918 dealt a huge blow to their economies from which neither country had recovered by the 1930s. British and French support for appeasement was also influenced by memories of the horror and enormous human cost of the First World War.



3. A key issue for Britain was the realisation that, as a result of its economic and military weakness, it lacked the resources to simultaneously wage war in Europe and defend its large and sprawling Empire.
4. Western democratic governments were not militarily prepared to wage war. The collapse of the World Disarmament Conference in November 1933 paved the way for German rearmament, while both Britain and France lagged well behind Nazi Germany. In fact, the military spending of Germany and the Soviet Union from 1933 to 1939 was double that of all the Western democratic states put together.
5. Until Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, British public opinion supported Chamberlain's appeasement policy.
6. By the mid-1930s, Britain believed that Germany had been harshly treated in the Treaty of Versailles and had some sympathy with Hitler's disregard for its terms. France, on the other hand, opposed Hitler's attempts to revise the Treaty since its geographical position made it more vulnerable to German aggression.
7. Up until the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, British Prime Minister Chamberlain considered Hitler to be a decent man of integrity. By contrast, the French Prime Minister, Édouard Daladier, was very doubtful about Hitler's sincerity but recognised that in 1938-1939 the French army was in no fit state to fight against Nazi Germany.
8. As noted above, both Britain and France regarded the Soviet Union as a greater threat than Nazi Germany until March 1939.



Web Audio

For a discussion of the Munich Conference and British appeasement policy, listen to Michael Portillo, Chamberlain and 'Peace for our Time' 1938, BBC Radio 4, 14 December 2009, at:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00p8998>

(iii) The attitude of fascist states to the Soviet Union 1933-1939

While Western democratic governments attempted to develop diplomatic ties with Stalin, fascist states, in particular Germany, adopted a hostile attitude to the Soviet Union. Hitler's hatred of the Soviet Union was based on ideological considerations. He loathed Communism and was fiercely anti-Semitic. This was clearly illustrated in *Mein Kampf* and was also a common theme of his speeches during the 1920s and 1930s. Hitler's aim was to destroy the Soviet Union, denouncing it as a Communist state controlled by Jews who were seeking world domination. He also stressed that *Lebensraum* for the German people would be gained following a successful invasion of the Soviet Union.

Hitler and the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini had enjoyed good relations since 1923 and, despite Mussolini's anger at Hitler's attempted annexation of Austria in 1934, became military allies in 1936. However, even though both men were fascist dictators, their foreign policies were determined by different factors. While Hitler's foreign policy was motivated primarily by ideological, economic and territorial considerations, the most important concern of Mussolini was to make territorial acquisitions and gain Italy the status of a 'Great Power'. Ideology played a much smaller role in Mussolini's foreign policy than Hitler's. Similarly, Mussolini was not an anti-Semite in the same way as Hitler. Although, in deference to Hitler, he introduced a Manifesto of Race in July 1938 which deprived Italian Jews of their citizenship, a more realistic impression of Mussolini's racial policy can be gained from his willingness to allow Jewish people to take refuge in Italy during the war.



Evidence of the co-operation between Germany, Spain and Italy against the Soviet Union can be illustrated by developments in the period 1936-1939:

1. The Spanish Civil War was in some respects a forerunner of the Second World War in that Germany and Italy supported the nationalist forces under Franco, while the Soviet Union backed the republican government in Madrid. Italy's involvement in the Spanish Civil War reflected its fear of the Soviet Union since, as Martin Collier pointed out, 'it could not permit a Communist government in the Mediterranean'.
2. In October 1936 Germany and Italy signed the Berlin Agreement, a series of protocols which have become known as the Rome-Berlin Axis. They agreed to co-operate on various political and military issues and to pursue the same foreign policy aims. The Berlin Agreement marked a major change in Italy's foreign policy since it had joined the Stresa Front, an alliance with Britain and France in opposition to the introduction of conscription and German rearmament, as recently as April 1935.
3. In November 1936 Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact, while Italy and Spain also joined the organisation in November 1936. As its name suggests, the Anti-Comintern Pact aimed to halt the spread of Communism and prevent the expansion of the Soviet Union. However, the Pact was not exclusively motivated by hostility to Communism since it was also aimed at Britain.
4. The Pact of Steel, signed on 22 May 1939, reinforced the close relations between Germany and Italy. The two powers agreed to provide mutual economic and military support in the event of attack by a hostile state. The Pact of Steel also contained secret clauses in which both signatories gave an undertaking not to go to war without the other. However, Mussolini was unable to honour this commitment when Hitler invaded Poland in September 1939.

(iv) The reasons for the failure of the League of Nations

Founded in 1920, the League of Nations aimed to preserve peace and promote disarmament. The underlying principle behind its formation was to safeguard its members through a policy of 'collective security'. Its membership increased from 42 in 1920 to 58 in 1934. During the 1920s it achieved some notable successes, such as its mediation in the dispute between Poland and Germany regarding Upper Silesia in 1921. The idea to establish a League of Nations originally came from the American President Woodrow Wilson and was the last of the Fourteen Points he proposed in January 1918 as a basis for peace negotiations to end the First World War.

Although the League of Nations was not formally dissolved until 1946, the outbreak of the Second World War sealed its fate. There are a number of reasons for its failure:

1. Although the idea for the establishment of the League derived from the American President, the United States never belonged to the organisation.
2. In the absence of the US, Britain and France were the most influential members of the League but both were economically weak as a result of the First World War and often pursued their own narrow diplomatic interests at the expense of the League's efforts to achieve 'collective security'.
3. Several major powers were not members of the League of Nations. Germany was excluded until 1926 and withdrew in 1933, while the Soviet Union did not become a member until 1934.



4. The League of Nations had several inherent weaknesses. For example, its decisions had to be unanimous and, while it could impose trade sanctions, it had no army to enforce its decisions.
5. The organisation responded weakly to Germany's occupation of the Rhineland in 1936 and its annexation of Austria in 1938.
6. But the helplessness of the League of Nations was most clearly displayed by its slow and ineffective reaction to the Japanese attack on Manchuria in September 1931. The League set up a committee under Victor Bulwer-Lytton to examine the respective claims of China and Japan but it did not report until October 1932. It ordered Japanese troops to withdraw from the Manchuria region, but when the Japanese government refused, the League of Nations was powerless to enforce its decision.
7. When Italy invaded Abyssinia in October 1935, the League of Nations was swift to condemn Mussolini's actions. However, the economic sanctions imposed on Italy were weak and none of the League's members was prepared to use its own troops to defend Abyssinia. Britain and France were reluctant to take a hard line with Mussolini out of fear that he would leave the Stresa Front and form an alliance with Nazi Germany.

The ineffectiveness of the League of Nations reinforced Stalin's growing concern that the policy of 'collective security' against Nazi Germany was doomed to failure.



Web Article

For an article on the aims, achievements and reasons for the failure of the League of Nations, see 'The League of Nations and United Nations' by Charles Townshend, 17 February 2011, at:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/league_nations_01.shtml

B. The Nazi-Soviet Pact, Operation Barbarossa and the Grand Alliance 1939-1945

(i) The Nazi-Soviet Pact August 1939

The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was signed in Moscow by Ribbentrop and Molotov on 23 August 1939. As well as giving a commitment not to attack each other, the Pact also contained a secret clause to divide up Poland and Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence. News of the agreement came as a huge shock, especially in Britain and France, because it was a pact between two sworn enemies who, to quote Ken Ward, had performed 'an ideological summersault'.

(a) What were the motives of the Soviet Union and Germany for the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact?

The Soviet Union's motives for concluding the Nazi-Soviet Pact remain a subject of intense historical debate:

1. Following the Nazis' rise to power in 1933, Stalin hoped to establish collective security by forming an alliance with Britain and France against Nazi Germany. He was willing to co-operate with these ideologically hostile powers in the interests of Soviet security. However, from 1935 to 1939 Stalin became convinced that the West was not serious about co-operation with the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany.



This conclusion was reinforced by the West's appeasement of Hitler at the Munich Conference in September 1938. For Stalin, this was again illustrated by the weak reaction of Chamberlain and Daladier to the Nazis' invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. In fact, Stalin maintained in a speech on 10 March 1939 that Britain and France were ceding areas of Czechoslovakia to Germany on condition that Hitler declared war against the Soviet Union and this was to become Moscow's official justification for signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact. It was against this background that the idea of a pact with Hitler became increasingly attractive to Stalin in the summer of 1939 as a means of preventing a potential attack by Nazi Germany on the Soviet Union.

2. Stalin also regarded the Nazi-Soviet Pact as an opportunity to build up the Red Army in preparation for the future conflict with Nazi Germany. This was particularly important since, as part of Stalin's Great Purge of 1937-1938, thousands of senior military officers had been dismissed or even murdered. Younger officers were appointed in their place but needed time to gain experience. Thus, security considerations influenced Stalin's policy, since the Soviet Union was not prepared for war in August 1939.
3. However, Soviet motives in signing the pact with Nazi Germany were aggressive and expansionist as well as defensive. As a result of the secret clause, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany agreed to divide up Northern and Eastern Europe into Soviet and Nazi spheres of influence. The Soviet Union would gain Bessarabia and the Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, while Poland would be divided between Germany and the Soviet Union.
4. Another possible motive for Stalin's actions is his expectation that Germany and the Western governments would fight themselves to a standstill, enabling the Soviet Union to fill the resulting power vacuum and impose Communism on the whole of Europe. This was certainly Goebbels's interpretation of Soviet intentions: 'Moscow intends to keep out of the war until Europe is bled white. Then Stalin will move to bolshevize Europe and impose his own rule'.

Germany's motives for concluding the Nazi-Soviet Pact are less controversial:

1. For Hitler, the most important reason for signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact was that it ensured that, when the Germany invaded Poland, it would not have to wage war on two fronts – against the Soviet Union in the East and Britain and France in the West. This plan to neutralise the Soviet Union displayed Hitler's willingness to set aside ideological differences, at least in the short term, for security reasons.
2. The secret clause committing Germany and the Soviet Union to invade Poland and divide it amongst themselves was very important to Hitler since it meant that Britain and France would almost certainly be unable to provide military support for Poland, since it would have hostile forces on both its Eastern and Western borders.

(b) What was the attitude of the Western governments to the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the outbreak of the Second World War?

1. The terms of the Pact of Steel, agreed by Hitler and Mussolini in May 1939, included a commitment by Italy to support Germany in the event of war, even if the Germans themselves were the aggressors. However, Mussolini failed to honour the agreement, informing Hitler on 25 August 1939 that Italy had not expected hostilities to begin until 1942 and would only be able to engage in war immediately if it received large quantities of weapons, petrol and raw materials – a set of thoroughly unrealistic



demands Hitler could not meet. Mussolini justified his decision, taken with great reluctance, to renege on his agreement with Hitler and remain neutral in the war, by arguing that Hitler had failed to inform him of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and planned attack on Poland. There were, however, several other factors which influenced Mussolini's decision to remain neutral in 1939. Firstly, the Italian economy was in a precarious position, partly as a result of the resources expended in connection with the Abyssinian Crisis of 1935-1936 and the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. Secondly, Italy's ill-equipped and badly trained armed forces were in no state to fight a war. Thirdly, Foreign Minister Ciano, supported by high-ranking army officers and military advisers, urged Mussolini not to become involved in the war. Fourthly, Italian public opinion was strongly opposed to participation in the war.

2. The British government responded to the Nazi-Soviet Pact by signing the Polish-British Common Defence Pact on 25 August, reaffirming the guarantee it had given on 31 March 1939 to defend Poland. In response, Hitler postponed his planned invasion of Poland on 26 August and offered to guarantee the security of the British Empire on the condition that Britain would agree to Germany's takeover of Eastern Europe, in particular Poland. However, despite frantic negotiations in the last few days of August, Chamberlain rejected Hitler's overtures. The policy of appeasement was at an end and, to quote Norman Davies, 'there could be no second Munich'.
3. France co-operated closely with Britain in the days following the announcement of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. On 1 September Hitler invaded Poland and two days later Britain and France declared war on Germany.
4. In response to Hitler's invasion of Poland, US President Roosevelt declared that the United States would remain neutral, a position supported by American public opinion. However, there was much sympathy for Britain in the USA and the Neutrality Act passed in November 1939 provided the legal basis to provide Britain with military aid. As a result, agreement was reached in August 1940, some sixteen months before America's entry into the war, for the US to 'loan' Britain 50 old destroyers. In March 1941 the US Congress approved the Lend-Lease Act which provided some 50 billion dollars for countries engaged in war against the Axis powers. Britain, with 31 billion dollars, was by far the largest recipient.

It should be stressed that, at least until the United States' entry into the war in December 1941, Western governments could do little to stop Hitler's spectacular military successes in both Eastern and Western Europe. The British were unable to provide Poland with military support. In a token gesture, France moved troops into the Saarland on 7 September but only managed to progress five miles into German territory. By 4 October 1939 Germany and the Soviet Union had defeated Poland. Nazi military successes in Western Europe were achieved with extraordinary speed in the summer of 1940 with the surrender of the Netherlands on 15 May, Belgium on 18 May and France on 21 June. At that point Britain found itself alone in the fight against Nazi Germany and its allies which now also included Italy which declared war on Britain and France on 10 June.

(c) Why did Italy enter the Second World War in June 1940?

Mussolini's decision to enter the Second World in June 1940 was determined by a complex range of contradictory factors, including economic and security considerations, as well as the desire for territorial gains. However, ideological factors did not play a significant role.

1. Mussolini was impressed with the spectacular military successes Hitler enjoyed between September 1939 and June 1940 and wanted to share the spoils of victory,



hoping, in particular, to make territorial gains in the Mediterranean. In short, he sought to profit from Hitler's conquests.

2. The Italian Prime Minister believed that Italy's declaration of neutrality in August 1939 advertised its weakness. He was particularly sensitive to this criticism since he had poured scorn on the neutrality of Liberal Italy during the First World War.
3. Mussolini feared for Italy's security if it did not join forces with Nazi Germany. Confident that Hitler would win the war, the Italian Prime Minister expressed concern that Germany would seek revenge for Italy's failure to honour the commitments it made in the Pact of Steel.
4. In March 1940 Hitler pledged to dispatch some 12 million tons of coal to Italy each year to moderate the impact of the British blockade of Italy's ports.

(ii) Operation Barbarossa and the formation of the Grand Alliance 1941-1945

On 22 June 1941 Hitler broke the Nazi-Soviet Pact and some 3 million German troops invaded the Soviet Union in Operation Barbarossa. Stalin, who had ignored numerous warnings and intelligence reports about the impending attack, appeared stunned and suffered a mental breakdown.

(a) Why did Hitler invade the Soviet Union in June 1941?

Historians have fiercely debated this question and, in particular, the timing of the attack. It would appear that several factors influenced Hitler's decision:

1. Ideological considerations played a key role. The German leader was deeply hostile to Communism and considered Russian Slavs to be an inferior race.
2. His planned takeover of the Soviet Union was also motivated by economic factors since it would provide further Lebensraum for the German people.
3. Despite the Nazi-Soviet Pact, relations between the two 'allies' had become very tense, as shown by Molotov's visit to Berlin in November 1940, and Hitler may have concluded that it would be better to mount an attack on the Soviet Union before the Red Army invaded Germany.
4. Hitler knew in June 1941 of Japan's plan to attack the United States. His invasion of the Soviet Union was a good tactical manoeuvre to prevent Stalin from becoming involved in the war in the Pacific.
5. Gerhard Weinberg has argued that the timing of Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union was influenced by Churchill's rejection of Hitler's overtures for peace in June 1940. This interpretation is supported by a speech Hitler delivered to his naval and military chiefs on 31 July 1940: 'Russia is the Far Eastern sword of Britain... with Russia smashed, Britain's last hope would be shattered... Russia's destruction must therefore be made part of this struggle'.

(b) The formation of the Grand Alliance

The German invasion of the Soviet Union initially achieved spectacular military successes. In fact, the Soviet air force was eliminated within a matter of days, while the advancing German armies captured a huge number of Soviet troops. In diplomatic terms, Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union had equally far-reaching consequences. Stalin revoked the Nazi-Soviet Pact and concluded a Mutual Assistance Treaty with Great Britain on 12 July 1941. However, such was the weakness of both Britain and the Soviet Union that, to



quote Norman Davies, the alliance 'amounted to little more than a club for invalids'. On 11 August the US President Franklin Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter but the US Congress continued to oppose American involvement in the Second World War. This was to change, however, on 7 December 1941 when the Japanese bombed the American Fleet at Pearl Harbour on the island of Hawaii. The United States' entry into the Second World War represented a key turning point in the fight against Hitler.

(c) What were the motives behind the formation of the Grand Alliance?

1. The establishment of the Grand Alliance was without doubt a 'marriage of convenience' in the face of a common enemy. Both the Soviet Union and Britain were motivated by pragmatic and security considerations. For both countries, especially the Soviet Union, survival was initially the key objective.
2. The severity of the crisis facing the Soviet Union and the Western Allies in June 1941 is illustrated by the fact that they were willing to overlook their ideological differences to find common cause in the war against Germany. Communists and capitalists made a commitment to fight together against fascism until the end of the war.
3. In entering into an alliance with Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt committed themselves to co-operation with a man they knew to be responsible for the murder of millions of his own people.

(d) To what extent did the operation of the Grand Alliance between 1941 and 1945 contribute to the onset of the Cold War?

While the Soviet Union and the Western Allies co-operated effectively during the early stages of the Grand Alliance, tensions and mistrust developed once it became clear that Nazi Germany would eventually be defeated:

1. From the outset of the Grand Alliance, Stalin exerted pressure on the Western Allies to open a second front against the Germany. He was suspicious of the motives for what he perceived to be the prevarication of the West on this issue, believing that Roosevelt and Churchill wanted the Soviet Union to continue to suffer the heaviest losses. After all, the war was largely fought on Soviet soil, and the Soviet Union suffered by far the most casualties, both military and civilian. During the siege of Stalingrad, some 800,000 people perished, more than the total number of British and American military personnel who lost their lives during the whole of the war. At the Moscow Conference, held in October 1943, Stalin pressed Roosevelt and Churchill to name a specific date when the second front would be opened. At the Tehran Conference in December 1943, Churchill reluctantly agreed to May 1944 as the date for an Anglo-American invasion of France. The actual date of the Normandy landings turned out to be June 1944.
2. A closely related issue was Stalin's fear that the Western Allies would sign a separate peace agreement with Germany. To reassure the Soviet leader, 26 states, including the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union, signed the Washington Pact on 1 January 1942 which pledged not to conclude a separate peace treaty with any of the Axis powers. This was reinforced by the Allied decision to require the 'unconditional surrender' of the German Reich. However, Stalin's distrust of the Western Allies remained and this appeared to be justified by the secret negotiations which took place in Switzerland in March 1945 between Karl Wolff, commander of the SS forces in Italy, and a US agent, Allen Dulles, about a possible surrender of Germany's forces in Northern Italy.



3. Clashes also developed about the future of post-war Europe. Roosevelt and Churchill aimed to establish 'democratic' governments in post-war Europe, including Eastern and Central Europe. Stalin, on the other hand, though favouring continuing co-operation with the West after the defeat of the Reich, believed that the security of the Soviet Union should never again be dependent on foreign powers. Hitler's betrayal in June 1941 and Stalin's growing mistrust of the Western Allies had convinced the Soviet leader of the importance of establishing 'friendly' pro-Soviet states in Eastern Europe which would act as a buffer zone between the Soviet Union and Germany. To the surprise of the Western Allies, Stalin agreed at the Yalta Conference to a document entitled 'Declaration on Liberated Europe' which envisaged democratic elections in Eastern European states such as Hungary and Poland. Stalin appears to have accepted this declaration because he was confident that the majority of voters would support the Communists. However, he changed his mind when the Communist Party in Hungary won just 17 per cent of the vote in a free and democratic election held in October 1945.
4. Poland was a key factor in the growing disunity of the Grand Alliance. The 'Percentages Agreement' drawn up in Moscow in October 1944 illustrated that Stalin and Churchill were able to concur informally about the degree of Soviet and Western influence in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia. However, no such agreement could be reached for Poland. Stalin regarded the installation of a 'friendly' government in Poland as essential to the Soviet Union's security interests. As a country which bordered Germany, it formed a key part of the buffer zone which would protect the Soviet Union from any future German aggression. Churchill, on the other hand, believed that he had a moral responsibility towards Poland, a country for which Britain had gone to war in 1939. He insisted that free elections should be held in Poland. This issue, as well as that of Poland's borders, was discussed at both Yalta and Potsdam but not resolved satisfactorily.
5. As will be seen in the sections on the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences, the wartime Allies also had very different views on how Germany should be treated after the fall of the Reich. While they all agreed that Germany should never again be allowed to endanger world peace, the Soviet Union advocated a much harsher treatment of Germany than the Western Allies.

B. The impact of the Second World War on the USSR, the Yalta and Potsdam Agreements

(i) The Soviet Union in 1945

The Second World War had a huge impact on the Soviet Union, particularly since most of the fighting took place on Soviet soil. In human terms some 26 million Soviet citizens lost their lives and in May 1945 there was scarcely a dinner table which did not have an empty seat. The economic damage European Russia suffered between 1941 and 1944 was also enormous. Some 70,000 villages and 2,000 towns were destroyed, as well as 65,000 kilometres of railway track. In 1941 the Red Army carried out a 'scorched earth' policy, destroying Soviet factories and industrial plant as it retreated in the face of the advancing German army, while the Germans implemented the same policy as they retreated in 1944. Soviet agriculture also experienced huge damage. The grain harvest in 1945 totalled 47.3 million tonnes, as opposed to 87 million in 1940.



(ii) The Yalta Conference

The Yalta Conference, held in February 1945 between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, confirmed that trust between the wartime Allies had broken down once victory for the Grand Alliance was assured.

(a) *Aims of the participants*

The Soviet Union

1. Stalin wanted to prevent the Western Allies from making a separate peace deal with Germany.
2. For both security and economic considerations, Stalin attached great importance to securing reparations from Germany.

The United States

1. President Roosevelt wanted Soviet help in the war against Japan.
2. He was also anxious that free elections were held in those countries in Eastern and Central Europe which the Soviet Union had taken over.

The United Kingdom

1. The British Prime Minister Churchill was particularly concerned that Poland did not become a Soviet satellite state.
2. Churchill also pressed for France to play a part in the occupation of Germany.

(b) *How far did the participants achieve their aims?*

In some respects the Western Allies were pleased with the outcome of the Yalta Conference. Stalin agreed to help the United States in the war against Japan and, with some reluctance, also accepted that France should be allocated a zone of occupation in Germany. On the issue of Poland, Churchill did not achieve his objectives; his negotiating position was weak because the Soviet Union was already occupying the country and the Lublin government had already been established. No agreement was reached on Poland's Western border. In addition, Britain and the USA agreed that the Soviet Union would receive reparations to the value of 10 billion dollars. Stalin's fears that the Western Allies might attempt to reach a separate peace agreement with Germany were borne out by events in March 1945 and this prompted Stalin to capture Berlin before the Western Allies.



Web article

For an excellent assessment of the Yalta Conference, see:

<https://history.blog.gov.uk/.../whats-the-context-4-february-1945-the-Yalta-Conference>

(iii) The Potsdam Conference 17 July – 2 August 1945

(a) *Developments between the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences*

Relations between the Soviet Union and the Western governments deteriorated to such an extent between February and July 1945 that Churchill secretly ordered British military planners to draw up a blueprint for 'Operation Unthinkable', a plan to invade the Soviet Union. Churchill's action was mainly in response to Soviet policy towards Poland.



When Stalin arrested Poland's non-Communist leaders in March 1945, it became clear that he envisaged it as a Soviet satellite state. The disintegration of the Grand Alliance was also a result of President Roosevelt's death on 12 April 1945. While Roosevelt had enjoyed a good relationship with Stalin, his successor, Harry Truman, was overtly hostile to Communism and deeply suspicious of the Soviet leader. The balance of power between the USA and the Soviet Union fundamentally changed during the Potsdam Conference as a result of the news that the United States had successfully tested its first atomic bomb. Truman therefore no longer required Stalin's assistance in the war against Japan and Churchill observed that Truman's attitude towards Stalin hardened as soon as he became aware of this development.

(b) The terms of the Potsdam Agreement

The Soviet Union and the Western Allies were able to reach agreement on the political decisions relating to the legacy of National Socialism but there were bitter disagreements about the economic future of Germany. While Stalin pursued a very harsh policy, the Western governments, especially Britain, were fearful of the political consequences if Germany became an economic wasteland.

1. The Soviet Union and the Western Allies reached agreement on measures to divide Germany into four zones of occupation, abolish all traces of National Socialism in Germany, destroy Germany's military strength and bring war criminals to justice.
2. The attempts by the Western Allies to guarantee Germany a minimum standard of living were undermined by the imprecise wording of article 15 (b) of the Potsdam Agreement.
3. On the contentious issue of reparations, each occupying power was permitted to take reparations from its own zone of occupation. In addition, the Soviet Union was entitled to remove as reparations 10 per cent of the industrial plant located in the Western Zones.
4. It was agreed to recognise Poland's Provisional Government and hold democratic elections. A decision about Poland's Western border was postponed until the planned peace conference, which, however, never took place because of the onset of the Cold War.

(c) Which of the participants had most reason to be pleased with the outcome of the Potsdam Conference?

Although Truman informed Stalin during the Potsdam Conference that the USA had successfully tested an atomic bomb, the Soviet negotiators nonetheless enjoyed a number of advantages over the Western Allies:

1. While Stalin had represented the Soviet Union at all the war conferences, the new American President, Harry Truman, lacked experience. There was also a lack of continuity on the British side since Clement Attlee replaced Churchill midway through the conference as a result of the Labour Party's landslide victory in the first post-war election.
2. The Western Allies lacked unity. The French leader, Charles de Gaulle, was not invited to the Potsdam Conference, while Truman supported Stalin rather than Churchill on many issues.
3. The Western Allies acknowledged that Stalin's demands to treat Germany harshly were justified by the enormous devastation the Soviet Union had suffered at the hands of the Germans.



- The Soviet Union was in a strong position to rebuff Churchill concerning Poland since its troops were already occupying that country. Stalin was also helped psychologically by the fact that Potsdam was in the Soviet Occupation Zone and many Soviet soldiers had been killed in the campaign to capture it.

**Question for discussion:**

How far would you agree with the view expressed by the historian Alan Bullock that 'Stalin's diplomatic successes at Yalta and Potsdam were as great as Hitler's in the 1930s'?

3. The search for security 1945-1956

A. The aims and motives of Soviet foreign policy 1945-1949

(i) Security

Bearing in mind the enormous losses the Soviet Union had suffered during the Second World War, it is hardly surprising that security was the most important policy consideration for Stalin in 1945. He was determined to ensure that the Soviet Union could never again be invaded, as had happened in 1914, 1918 and, above all, in 1941. To this end he aimed to eradicate German militarism, dismember the German state and establish a 'buffer zone' of friendly states on the Soviet Union's Western border as a guarantee against future German aggression. Recent events had made Stalin particularly anxious to ensure that a pro-Communist government was installed in Poland.

(ii) To gain economic resources for the Soviet Union

In view of the huge material damage European Russia had suffered between 1941 and 1944, Stalin sought to exploit the economic resources of Eastern Europe and, in particular, Germany. For Stalin the transportation to the Soviet Union of reparations from German industrial production and its dismantled industrial plant had the dual aim of weakening Germany economically and rebuilding the shattered Soviet economy. According to initial Soviet proposals, 80 per cent of Germany's industrial plant should be dismantled.

(iii) Ideological expansionism

While both Churchill and Roosevelt recognised Stalin's moral justification for establishing a buffer zone between the Soviet Union and Germany, they insisted that he should hold free elections in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and the other Eastern European states. Stalin agreed to this at the Yalta Conference but failed to honour his promise. Instead, he installed Communist governments in Albania and Rumania in 1945, Bulgaria in 1946, Poland and Hungary in 1947 and Czechoslovakia in 1948. Fears among Western leaders that these actions indicated Stalin's desire to impose Communism on Western Europe appeared to be substantiated by the Soviet Union's blockade of Berlin in June 1948.



(iv) Co-operation with the Western Allies

Stalin had never forgotten the intervention of the Western powers on the side of the Whites in the Russian Civil War of 1918-1921. However, despite his deep distrust of the West, he nevertheless attempted to work with the Western governments until June 1947, maintaining that peace, strong trading relations and a weak Germany were of mutual interest to all the wartime Allies. In this way Stalin hoped to obtain American economic and technological assistance to promote the post-war reconstruction of the Soviet Union. For example, at the Potsdam Conference, the Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov proposed that the Ruhr, one of Germany's key industrial areas, should be brought under international control.

B. The aims and motives of British foreign policy 1945-1949

(i) Security

British foreign policy in the early post-war years was heavily determined by security considerations, especially the fear of Communism. In fact, the British recognised the Soviet threat earlier than the United States. As Anne Deighton has argued, Germany represented 'the short-term problem but the long-term threat was the Soviet Union'. This fear of Communism was vividly expressed in Winston Churchill's famous speech at Fulton, Missouri on 5 March 1946: 'An Iron Curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line the states of Central and Eastern Europe are subject not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and increasing measure of control from Moscow'. Conscious of the importance of not repeating the mistake of appeasing Nazi Germany in the 1930s, Britain was determined to stand up to what it perceived as the Soviet threat.

(ii) Domestic considerations

British foreign policy in the early post-war years was influenced heavily by the very precarious economic situation at home. In fact, the British economy was on the verge of collapse during the extremely harsh winter of 1946-1947. This was partly due to its very high foreign expenditure. The British Zone in Germany included most of the country's heavily damaged industrial areas and proved to be a huge economic burden. As a result, the British government reluctantly announced in March 1947 that it could no longer provide financial assistance to counter the Communist threat in Greece and Turkey.

(iii) To safeguard Germany from Communism

An underlying assumption of British foreign policy after the Second World War was that economically deprived people would fall victim to Communism. British politicians, particularly Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin, maintained that the very harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles had contributed significantly to the rise of the Nazis and warned that, if Germany became an economic wasteland after 1945, it would be vulnerable to Communism. Britain therefore wanted to revive Germany's peacetime economy and during discussions on the level of German steel production in November 1945 argued for a much higher figure than the Soviet Union or even the United States.



(iv) To maintain close co-operation with the United States

Britain was initially wary of the United States, fearing that the Americans might withdraw from Europe and pursue a policy of isolationism, as they had done after the First World War. A key aim of post-war British foreign policy was therefore to work closely with the United States Government in Europe. Stalin's assumption that Britain would pursue an independent foreign policy and might even declare war on the US was totally misplaced.

C. The aims and motives of American foreign policy after the Second World War

While Soviet and British foreign policy aims remained largely consistent between 1945 and 1949, the objectives of US foreign policy in Europe underwent significant changes between 1944 and 1947 as its relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated.

In 1944-1945 the main policy objectives of the USA were:

(i) Security

As a result of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and the war in Europe, US President Franklin Roosevelt sought to create peacekeeping organisations and at the Yalta Conference it was agreed to set up the United Nations, to which both the United States and the Soviet Union would belong.

(ii) Withdraw its troops from Europe

At the Yalta Conference President Roosevelt spoke of withdrawing American troops from Europe by 1947 and the United States began to implement this policy in the autumn of 1945. In fact, it seemed at first as if the United States was going to adopt the same policy of isolationism it had pursued after the First World War. However, this policy was reversed at the beginning of 1947.

(iii) Promote trade relations with Europe

While the British and Soviet economies had been ravaged by the Second World War, the United States had become the world's dominant economic power, its Domestic Product doubling from 1941 to 1945. After the Second World War the US wanted to consolidate and develop its trading links with Europe, recognising that a prosperous Europe would provide an important market for American goods. Free trade, it was argued, would also help to preserve peace.

(iv) Co-operate with the Soviet Union

President Roosevelt aimed to co-operate with the Soviet Union after the conclusion of the Second World War. In fact, one of his closest aides, Harry Hopkins, asserted that the President and his advisers were confident that they could 'get along with [the Soviets] peacefully for as far into the future as any of us could imagine'.



D. The deterioration in relations between the Soviet Union and Western governments 1945-1949

There has been intense historical debate about the reasons for the outbreak of the Cold War.

The traditional view was that the Soviet Union was primarily to blame, while revisionists in the 1970s argued that the United States was solely responsible. Other historians have expressed the view that security was the main concern of both the Soviet Union and Western governments and the Cold War was based on misperceptions on both sides.

However, it is clear that a number of factors contributed to the worsening of relations between the Soviet Union and Western governments and the onset of the Cold War:

(i) The death of Franklin Roosevelt

President Roosevelt had gained Stalin's trust during the war and his death in April 1945 dealt a blow to US-Soviet relations because his successor, Harry Truman, harboured suspicions about Soviet intentions and had a strained relationship with the Soviet leader.

(ii) The Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe

The Western governments became increasingly fearful of the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe. It was agreed at the Yalta Conference that free elections would take place in the Eastern European states but it soon became clear that this was not going to happen. The United States and Britain protested unsuccessfully against the establishment of a Communist government in Poland in 1945 and by the end of 1947 Czechoslovakia was the only Eastern European government not under Soviet control. However, two months later, on 25 February 1948, a Communist government was installed in Prague and it was this coup which convinced Western leaders that they had to stand up to the Soviet Union when it imposed the Berlin Blockade in June 1948.

The Western Allies were also concerned about the terrible atrocities the Red Army committed against German refugees and expellees as they moved westwards in 1944-1945. In addition, Truman was alarmed at the scale of the Soviet Union's exploitation of its zone of occupation. During the summer and autumn of 1945 some 4,300 of the 17,000 industrial enterprises in the Soviet Occupation Zone in Germany were dismantled and taken to the Soviet Union. As a result, its industrial output had been reduced by over 25 per cent by the end of 1947.

(iii) The US use of the atom bomb against Japan

During the Second World War the United States and Britain had been secretly building an atomic bomb to use against Germany. They did not share this information with Stalin, their wartime ally, until the Potsdam Conference in July 1945. The Soviet leader took the news in his stride since he knew about it already from his spies. However, he reacted angrily when an American B 29 bomber dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 and on Nagasaki three days later. Stalin regarded the American action as an attempt to intimidate and win concessions from the Soviet Union in Europe. Stalin instructed his scientists to develop their own atom bomb, a feat they had achieved by 1949.



(iv) Kennan's Long Telegram and the Soviet response

In response to a number of questions from the US State Department, George Kennan, a junior member of staff at the American Embassy in Moscow, wrote a cable on 22 February 1946 which was to form the basis of US policy towards the Soviet Union for the remainder of the Cold War. He argued that the Soviet Union was inherently aggressive. The West should not anticipate that concessions would be reciprocated but would, on the contrary, be perceived as a sign of weakness. According to Kennan, the United States should aim for a 'patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies'. The Soviet Union's ambassador in Washington, Nikolai Novikov, asserted on 27 September 1946 that the US 'was striving for world supremacy'.

(v) The transformation of US economic policy towards Germany 1944-1947

Fears in Washington about the Soviet Union's 'expansive tendencies' led to a fundamental change in US foreign policy towards Germany. In 1944-1945 its policy was characterised by harshness. It was still influenced by the ideas of Henry Morgenthau, the US Secretary to the Treasury, who in September 1944 put forward a plan to eliminate most of Germany's heavy industry, close down its coal mines and flood them.

By May 1945 US policy had undergone a subtle change in that the policy makers in Washington envisaged a strong Europe but weak Germany. On 6 September 1946 James Byrnes, US Secretary of State, announced in a speech in Stuttgart the first significant change in US policy by arguing that the economic rehabilitation of Europe would be impossible without the recovery of the German economy. This fundamental change in US policy was not just motivated by humanitarian but, above all, political considerations. The United States feared that the starving, economically deprived inhabitants of Germany would become vulnerable to Communism. As General Lucius Clay, Military Governor of the US Occupation Zone, argued, starving people would opt to be 'a Communist on 1,500 calories a day' rather than 'a capitalist on 1,000'.

(vi) The Truman Doctrine and Marshall Aid

The Truman Doctrine and Marshall Aid were the practical policies which implemented George Kennan's proposed containment of the Soviet Union:

(a) The Truman Doctrine

When Britain abandoned its financial support to Greece and Turkey in March 1947, Truman considered it essential to provide aid to both countries to safeguard them from the threat of Communism. According to Truman, if Greece succumbed to the Communists, Italy, France, Germany and Britain would shortly follow. In a speech to the US Congress 12 March 1947, he warned his fellow countrymen against isolationism and maintained that it was the duty of the United States 'to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures'. According to Truman, the United States would provide economic and military help to counteract both external and internal threats. As a result, an initially reluctant American Congress agreed to set aside 340 million dollars for the Greek government to buy arms and other supplies and give 60 million dollars to Turkey for the same purpose. To sum up, the Truman Doctrine, as it came to be known, was motivated by security considerations and a fear of the Soviet Union.

**Web article**

For a transcript of the Truman doctrine, see:

http://www.ourdocuments.gov/print_friendly.php?page=transcript&doc=81&title=Transcript+of+Truman+Doctrine+%281947%29

(b) Marshall Aid

While the focus of the Truman Doctrine was on military aid for countries the US considered to be endangered by Communism, Marshall Aid aimed to avert the perceived threat from left-wing radicalism in Europe by the provision of economic and financial aid on a huge scale. Post-war Europe was characterised by hunger and starvation, poor housing conditions, low production and widespread unemployment. Western leaders regarded these as the ideal breeding ground for the growth of Communism, arguing that people who had nothing to lose were vulnerable to the overtures of the Communists. The electoral successes of the Communist Party in post-war France and Italy reinforced these fears among policy makers in Washington. As a result, the US Secretary of State, George Marshall, announced to the US Congress on 5 June 1947 details of the European Recovery Programme (ERP) which became known as Marshall Aid. While Marshall stressed that the ERP offered economic aid to all European countries, Stalin was unlikely to accept the condition of being willing to accept Western goods and open Soviet financial records for scrutiny. Consequently, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov condemned Marshall Aid as 'dollar imperialism' and prevented two of its satellite states, Poland and Czechoslovakia, from taking part. This represented a key turning point in the Cold War and deepened the growing rift between the Soviet Union and Western governments. Between 1948 and 1952 sixteen Western European countries received more than 13.3 billion dollars of Marshall Aid. Significantly, the Western Zones of Germany, which became the focal point of the Cold War, were the largest beneficiary.

Marshall Aid had important economic and political consequences. In economic terms, it was one of the most important factors in the reconstruction of the Western European economy after 1948. It also provided an important stimulus for trade between Europe and the United States. Moreover, it represented further evidence that the United States would play a key role in European affairs. However, in political terms Marshall Aid widened the gap between the Soviet Union and the West and provoked further tension with Moscow. In response to Marshall Aid, Stalin established Cominform in September 1947 to impose Soviet control on Communist parties in Eastern Europe. This was followed on 25 February 1948 by the Prague coup, the replacement of a democratic government including non-Communists by a purely Communist government. The events in Prague had two other important consequences. Firstly, it prompted an initially hesitant US Congress to approve Marshall Aid monies; secondly, it convinced Western leaders of the need to stand firm against the Soviet Union. This formed the background to the impending crisis over Berlin.

**Web Video**

For an assessment of the reasons for and significance of the Marshall Plan, watch www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/marshall-plan



(vii) The Berlin Blockade 1948-1949

The precondition for the imposition of the Berlin Blockade was the unusual geographical position of Berlin. Although occupied by the four wartime allies, Berlin was located some 125 miles inside the Soviet Occupation Zone. Rail and road traffic from the Western Zones of Germany to West Berlin therefore had to travel through the Soviet Zone. The vulnerability of West Berlin was made worse by the absence of a formal agreement between the Soviet Union and Western governments guaranteeing road and rail links. A verbal agreement between Stalin and Clay had been reached on 29 June 1945 but it was never confirmed in writing. The only formal agreement concerned Western access by air and it is significant that the Soviet Union made no serious effort to block flights into West Berlin during the Blockade.

The Berlin Blockade began on 24 June 1948. The Western Allies, particularly the Americans, responded by mounting an airlift to feed West Berlin's 2 million inhabitants. Between 26 June 1948 and 12 May 1949 the Western powers supplied Berlin with 2.3 million tons of food, coal and other necessities. During the same period Allied planes made 277,728 flights to West Berlin.



Web audio

For a discussion of the events in Berlin in 1948-1949, see 'The Berlin Airlift: the Reunion' in the BBC's Germany: History and Culture series, 4 May 2014 at www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0276f1r

(a) Causes of the Blockade

1. The most important reason for the Berlin Blockade was Stalin's realisation that the Western Allies aimed to build up the Western Zones of Germany economically and establish a separate West German government. This action was in direct opposition to the Soviet policy of keeping Germany economically weak. The Blockade was therefore the product of the fundamental clash of interests between the Soviet Union and Western governments.
2. The immediate trigger for the Blockade of Berlin was the decision of the Americans, British and French to introduce a Currency Reform in June 1948 in the Western Zones of Germany, including its sectors in Berlin. This action, which followed the merging of the American, British and French Zones, confirmed Stalin's fear that the West was proposing to set up a separate West German state.
3. At the time the British and Americans viewed the Blockade as the first step in an attempt to bring about a Soviet takeover of Western Europe. However, it is clear in retrospect that the Soviet Union was not prepared to risk war in pursuit of its objectives. For example, it did not seriously violate the agreement regarding Western access to West Berlin by air and in fact co-operated with the Western Allies in the Berlin Air Safety Centre throughout the Blockade.
4. During 1946 and 1947 Western governments had turned a blind eye to Soviet actions which suggested that it regarded the city as part of its Occupation Zone. For example, the land reforms introduced in the Soviet Zone were applied to the whole of Berlin. The failure of the West to react to this and similar provocative actions may have convinced Stalin that he would win any conflict of wills over Berlin. However, it was the Prague coup in February 1948 which convinced the British and the Americans that they would have to resist any pressure the Soviet Union exerted on the Western sectors of Berlin.



(b) Significance of the Blockade

1. It signified the final breakdown of the Grand Alliance and reinforced the view of Western politicians that it was essential to stand up to the Soviet Union. 2. It provided an important psychological boost for the Western Allies.
2. It demonstrated that, while the Soviet Union attempted to force the Western powers out of Berlin, it was unwilling to risk war to achieve its objectives. The West also rejected the use of force and Truman vetoed General Clay's idea of breaking the blockade by forcing a way through the East German checkpoints.
3. It convinced the United States to abandon isolationism and form a peacetime military alliance, leading to the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in April 1949. Although most of its members came from Western Europe, Canada and, in particular, the United States played a key role. Member states committed themselves to placing their armed forces under NATO command and regarding hostile military action against one member state as an attack against all of them. As Lord Ismay, a leading British military figure and politician, put it, NATO was established to 'keep the Russians out, the Germans down and the Yanks in'.
4. The Berlin Blockade made the division of Germany inevitable. As a result, the German Federal Republic (commonly known as West Germany) was founded in May 1949, while the German Democratic Republic (commonly known as East Germany) came into being in the following October.
5. In January 1949, during the Berlin Airlift, the Soviet Union responded to Marshall Aid by forming the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), an organisation set up to co-ordinate economic developments in the Soviet satellite states.

E. The successes and failures of Soviet foreign policy in Europe 1945-1949

- (i) The Soviet Union had succeeded in establishing a 'buffer zone' of friendly states on its Western border as a guarantee against German aggression. However, the Communist governments in Eastern Europe were not elected in free democratic elections and Stalin's belief that the Communists would also come to power in France and Italy proved to be misplaced.
- (ii) Between July 1945 and August 1949 Stalin was at a crucial disadvantage in his dealings with the United States because it had the atomic bomb but the Soviet Union did not. When the Soviet Union successfully tested the atom bomb in August 1949, several years ahead of schedule, it was a huge boost for Stalin.
- (iii) Stalin was alarmed at Marshall Tito's refusal to follow Moscow's policies. This led to Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform in June 1948.
- (iv) The Berlin Blockade had turned out to be a failure as it prompted the USA to abandon isolationism and set up NATO.
- (v) Stalin's aim of keeping Germany weak proved an abject failure and by 1961 West Germany was one of the world's leading economies.
- (vi) Stalin's attempts to gain huge reparations from Germany to finance post-war reconstruction at home enjoyed only limited success. Reparations from its Occupation Zone promised more than they delivered, while the breakdown in the Grand Alliance denied the Soviet Union access to the industrial resources of the Ruhr.



F. The successes and failures of the foreign policy of Western governments in Europe 1945-1949

- (i) The US and British governments were willing to accept the existence of Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe.
- (ii) President Truman succeeded in winning the approval of Congress for funds to meet the perceived Communist threat in Turkey and Greece and by 1949 the Communists in Greece had been defeated.
- (iii) Marshall Aid proved to be extremely successful in strengthening the West European economies as an antidote to the spread of Communism.
- (iv) The Berlin Airlift represented a great success for Western governments, especially the United States. It demonstrated to Stalin the resolve of the Western powers. This was reinforced by the establishment of NATO which formed the cornerstone of the security of Western governments against the Soviet Union.
- (v) However, the Soviet Union's successful atom bomb test in August 1949 changed the relationship and power balance between the Soviet Union and the West. In fact, President Truman maintained that 'the Russians would have taken over Europe a long time ago' if the United States had not possessed the atom bomb.



Question for discussion:

Was the Soviet Union or the West primarily responsible for the breakdown of the Grand Alliance and the outbreak of the Cold War?

G. Relations between the Soviet Union and Western governments 1949-1956

(i) 1949-1953

During the early 1950s the Cold War was at its height. Arms expenditure increased and both the West and the Soviet Union developed thermonuclear weapons from 1951 onwards. At the same time, both power blocs were wary of taking actions which might lead to nuclear war.

The Korean War (1950-1953) increased the antagonism between the Soviet Union and Western governments in Europe and brought about the rearming of the German Federal Republic (GFR). At the time when the Western powers were discussing plans to rearm West Germany, Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, delivered a note on 10 March 1952, proposing a neutral, peaceful and democratic reunified Germany. The Western Allies, strongly supported by the West German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, rejected the note on the basis that it was a ploy designed to divide the West. Although the historian Rolf Steininger has argued that this represented 'a missed opportunity', documents from Soviet and East German archives support the view that the West was justified in rejecting it. While the period 1949-1953 was characterised by continuing hostility between the Soviet Union and the West, the years 1953-1956 witnessed more change than continuity.



(ii) The impact of Stalin's death on relations between the Soviet Union and Western governments

Stalin's death on 5 March 1953, only six weeks after the inauguration of a new US President, Dwight Eisenhower, provided the opportunity for a fresh start in US-Soviet relations. Both countries wanted to reduce military expenditure for domestic reasons and both aimed to adopt a more conciliatory approach to the other. For example, at Stalin's funeral Georgy Malenkov argued for coexistence with the West, while Khrushchev asserted that it was perfectly feasible for capitalism and Communism to operate in 'peaceful coexistence'. This became the key theme of his rule of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Eisenhower delivered a speech in April 1953 focusing on the 'chance for peace'. This more conciliatory attitude did provide some positive results. The most important was the withdrawal of French, British and American troops from Austria in May 1955 on condition that it became a neutral state. At the Geneva Conference in July 1955 the four wartime Allies agreed to uphold the existing political status quo in Europe, while in September of the same year the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations with the GFR.

Despite Khrushchev's aim of 'peaceful coexistence' with the West and establishing better relations with Yugoslavia, he also wanted to ensure that Eastern Europe remained firmly under Soviet control. The Soviet leadership was willing to give its satellite states some autonomy as long as they did not seek to leave the Soviet sphere of influence. However, the period witnessed unrest in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Poland and Hungary.

(iii) The consequences of Soviet reforms in Eastern Europe 1953-1956

(a) The East German Uprising June 1953

The economic situation in the GDR after the Second World War was very precarious and food shortages became particularly acute during the winter of 1952-1953. These economic difficulties were partly due to the Sovietisation policies pursued by the East German leader Walter Ulbricht. These policies increased the dissatisfaction of the population and swelled the flood of refugees across the open border from East to West Berlin. Following Stalin's death the 'collective leadership, especially, Lavrenti Beria, exerted pressure on Ulbricht to slow down the Sovietisation process, introduce economic reforms, make concessions to farmers and reduce taxes. In response, Ulbricht made a number of concessions, thus raising the expectations of the East German workers. However, when, on 14 June, Ulbricht appeared to withdraw some of these concessions, disturbances broke out in the industrial areas of Halle, Leipzig, Magdeburg and, above all, East Berlin. The unrest was not quelled until the intervention of Soviet troops to restore order. The events of 17 June 1953 prompted the USSR to make a firm commitment to the GDR and consolidate its influence over its satellite states in Eastern Europe.



Web Article

For an interesting insight into the East German Uprising, including the response of the West, see: <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB50>

(b) The Hungarian Uprising November 1956

By 1955 Nikita Khrushchev had won the power struggle following Stalin's death and in May 1955, some two months after the GFR had been admitted to NATO, he oversaw the creation of the Warsaw Pact. Under the leadership of the Soviet Union, its members included Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Hungary, Poland and Rumania.



For Khrushchev it had the important advantage of enabling Soviet forces to be stationed in each of the member states in order to retain control. Against this background Khrushchev introduced a policy of de-Stalinisation, announcing in April 1955 that the Soviet Union supported the principle of self-determination, a pledge which created enormous interest in Eastern Europe since it suggested that Moscow would allow its satellite states to leave the Soviet bloc. In the summer of 1955 Khrushchev apologised to Tito for the way Stalin had treated Yugoslavia. More important still, the Soviet leader denounced Stalin in his 'Secret Speech', delivered in February 1956 to the party faithful. Two months later, he disbanded Cominform, a move which was interpreted as a sign that the Soviet leader supported change.

However, Khrushchev had failed to learn the lessons of the East German Uprising. Just as the promise of reforms in the GDR in 1953 had led to unrest, Khrushchev's apparent signal that he was willing to introduce reforms in Eastern Europe in 1956 precipitated disturbances in Poland and Hungary. The death of Poland's hardline Communist leader Boleslaw Bierut raised expectations which prompted demonstrations and unrest in Poznań. While the disturbances in Poland were ultimately resolved peacefully with the promise of greater freedom within the Soviet Empire, a more serious revolt broke out in Hungary. Hungary found itself in a serious economic crisis, caused by poor harvests and the fact that a significant proportion of its food and industrial production had to be dispatched to the Soviet Union. As a result, students staged demonstrations on 23 October 1956 and demanded reforms. In an attempt to avert the growing crisis in Budapest, Khrushchev reinstated the reformer Imre Nagy as Prime Minister three days later. On 1 November Nagy declared that Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact and demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. On 4 November the Red Army crossed the border and crushed the revolt with an estimated 25,000 -30,000 casualties.

The suppression of the uprising by the Red Army ushered in a period of repression and re-Stalinisation. Soviet troops remained on Hungarian soil until 1989. In order to avert future unrest, the Kremlin announced a generous economic agreement with Hungary which increased disposable income in 1957 by as much as 21 per cent. As Ray Pearson observed, there was a 'shift from the military stick to the economic carrot'. This applied not just to Hungary but the other Soviet satellite states and this pattern continued until 1989.



Web article

For more details on the Hungarian Uprising, see:

<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/modern-world-history-1918-to-1980/the-cold-war/the-hungarian-uprising-of-1956/>

(c) Western governments and the unrest in Eastern Europe 1953-1956

The response of Western governments to the disturbances in the GDR, Poland and Hungary between 1953 and 1956 confirmed that they had accepted Soviet control of Eastern Europe. Of course, Western politicians declared their public support for the East German, Polish and Hungarian people and bitterly condemned what they described as 'Soviet imperialism'. However, this was the extent of Western support. John Foster Dulles, US Secretary of State, argued on American television in the autumn of 1956 that the United States was not prepared to intervene militarily in Eastern Europe for fear of precipitating a Third World War. The Western powers were also wary of making statements which would raise unrealistic expectations among Moscow's satellite states. Instead, they adopted a strategy which attempted to bring about change in Eastern Europe by applying diplomatic pressure on the Soviet government, setting up cultural exchanges between Western and Soviet bloc countries and providing financial help for Moscow's satellite



states. For example, the US gave Poland an economic aid package after the peaceful resolution of the unrest in 1956. Only in the GDR did the West arguably influence the scale of the uprising of 17 June 1953 because, while the official East German media made no mention of the demonstrations and protests which took place in East Berlin on 16 June, its citizens were able to tune in to West German radio bulletins which spread the news.

4. Co-operation and coexistence 1956-1979

A. The aims and motives of Soviet foreign policy 1956-1964

After the Hungarian Uprising the aims and motives of Soviet foreign policy were similar to those in the early post-war years:

(i) Security

Survival and security remained the cornerstone of Soviet foreign policy and Evans and Jenkins have suggested that Khrushchev's aims closely resembled those of Stalin. In particular, he was concerned about West Germany's membership of NATO in May 1955, its rearmament and the prospect of nuclear weapons being stationed on West German soil.

(ii) Peaceful coexistence

Khrushchev aimed to enter into a dialogue with Western governments, as illustrated by his visit to the United States in 1959, as well as the summit meetings held in Paris in 1960 and Vienna in 1961.

(iii) Promote domestic stability in the USSR

Khrushchev's foreign policy was also influenced by domestic considerations. In order to consolidate his own precarious position at home, the Soviet leader attempted to gain foreign policy successes by pursuing aggressive, and potentially risky, policies, such as his attempt to force the West to give up West Berlin between 1958 and 1961.

(iv) Reduce military expenditure

In the period 1950-1955 the number of soldiers in the Red Army increased from 2.8 million to 5.8 million. But this put a huge strain on the Soviet economy and from 1955 onwards Khrushchev sought to achieve cuts in the Soviet Union's military spending by reducing the size of its conventional forces and placing more emphasis on its nuclear weapons. However, even though the Soviet Union had tested a powerful thermonuclear device in November 1955, its nuclear capacity remained well behind that of the United States.

(v) Ideological expansionism

Despite stressing his effort to achieve peaceful coexistence with the West, Khrushchev's foreign policy was often aggressive and threatened peace in Europe.



B. The aims and motives of US foreign policy 1956-1964

(i) Containment

During the 1950s the USA expanded both its conventional and nuclear forces on a huge scale. The size of its conventional forces rose by 1 million from 1950 to 1953, while the increase in its nuclear capacity was even more striking. In fact, the United States Strategic Air Command possessed no fewer than 1,735 bombers in 1960 with the capacity to launch nuclear bombs on Soviet targets. While acknowledging in 1956 that there would be no winners in a nuclear war, President Eisenhower nonetheless adhered to official US policy that it would, if required, be prepared to use nuclear weapons for defensive purposes. At the same time, neither Britain nor the United States was prepared to initiate action which might lead to a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union.

(ii) Retain the unity of Western governments

Both President Eisenhower and the West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer expressed disquiet about the tendency of both the British and French governments to seek an accommodation with the Soviet Union, maintaining that Khrushchev would regard a willingness to compromise as a weakness which could be exploited. For example, both Eisenhower and Adenauer disapproved of the visit of the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to Moscow in July 1959 to discuss the crisis over Berlin.

C. The Second Berlin Crisis 1958-1961

In November 1958 Khrushchev initiated the Second Berlin Crisis when he demanded that the United States, Britain and France should withdraw their 11,000 troops from the Western Sectors of Berlin and grant the GDR formal recognition. If they failed to meet these demands within six months, Khrushchev announced that he would conclude a peace treaty with the GDR and hand over responsibility for controlling the access routes to Berlin to the East Germans. When the United States refused to accept Khrushchev's ultimatum, the Soviet leader, conscious perhaps of the overwhelming nuclear superiority of the United States, backed down. When Khrushchev visited Washington in 1959, it was agreed to hold a four-power meeting on Berlin in Paris in May 1960. However, it collapsed before it had begun when the USSR shot down an American U-2 spy plane in the Urals and, as a result, Khrushchev walked out of the meeting. In June 1961, the new US President, John F Kennedy, held a summit meeting with Khrushchev in Vienna, where the Soviet leader repeated his earlier ultimatum on Berlin. When Kennedy failed to accede to this demand, Khrushchev gave the East German leader, Walter Ulbricht, permission to erect the Berlin Wall and work began on 13 August 1961.

(i) Why did the Soviet Union authorise the construction of the Berlin Wall?

- (a) The Americans had developed West Berlin as a showcase for the success of Western values. It was a prosperous capitalist 'island' in the middle of the economically weak, Communist GDR. To quote Pearson: 'West Berlin damaged East Germany's 'political credibility'.
- (b) As a result of the huge difference in the standard of living between East and West Germany, some 2.6 million refugees migrated from East to West Berlin in the period 1949-1961. The majority were young, well educated, professional people, including doctors and dentists, who the GDR could ill afford to lose. The situation became more acute in 1960-1961 and no fewer than 207,000 East German refugees sought political



asylum in the West in the first half of 1961. By this time the exodus was having a serious effect on the East German economy.

- (c) Western intelligence services were able to use West Berlin to obtain information about Soviet actions.

(ii) How did the West respond to the construction of the Berlin Wall?

- (a) Although American tanks appeared on the streets of West Berlin and the US government recalled General Lucius Clay to Berlin to supervise American troops scaling a makeshift wall in the US Sector of the city, the official American response to the construction of the wall was more measured. Kennedy limited his response to verbal condemnations and no economic sanctions were imposed on the states in the Soviet bloc. In private, Kennedy admitted that 'a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war'. The West's lukewarm response to the erection of the Berlin Wall dismayed many West Germans.
- (b) West Germany's population expressed anger and sadness at the construction of the wall which cut off many families and friends. However, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer misjudged the mood of the West German people and, above all, the West Berliners by not visiting West Berlin until ten days after the wall had been built.

(iii) How far can the construction of the Berlin Wall be considered a success for the Soviet Union?

- (a) The Berlin Wall symbolised the Cold War but also represented humiliation for Khrushchev and an acknowledgement that Communism could not compete with capitalism.
- (b) The wall stabilised the GDR's economy by stemming the flood of East German refugees to the West. Since from 1961 onwards East Germany's citizens no longer had the option of fleeing to the West, the GDR government was able to introduce measures such as conscription to the army which aimed to promote loyalty to the East German state. This policy achieved some success and an East German identity gradually developed.
- (c) During the Second Berlin Crisis Khrushchev took great care to avoid the risk of war.

(iv) To what extent did the Western governments regard the construction of the Berlin Wall as a success?

- (a) The Berlin Wall cemented the division of Germany. While the Paris Agreement of October 1954 legally obligated the United States, Britain and France to support the reunification of Germany, they were privately opposed to it. For example, Lord Hume, the British Foreign Secretary, wrote in February 1962: 'We do not ourselves want to see Germany reunited'. The same sentiments were expressed even more forcefully by the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1990.
- (b) As a result of the Second Berlin Crisis, both the German Federal Republic and West Berlin became even more firmly integrated in the Western Alliance. This was illustrated by Kennedy's famous speech in June 1963 when, in declaring that West Berlin represented the free world, he asserted: 'Ich bin ein Berliner'.

**Web Article**

For an interesting account, from an American perspective, of the night when the construction of the Berlin Wall began, see

<https://adst.org/2014/08/the-berlin-wall-is-built-august-13-1961>

D. From conflict to the beginnings of détente 1961-1964

Following some eight years of intermittent negotiations, the American, British and Soviet Foreign Ministers signed the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in August 1963. It banned nuclear weapon tests under the water, in the atmosphere and in outer space. At the same time, a hotline was established between the White House and the Kremlin to enable the US and Soviet leaders to talk directly to each other in the event of a crisis.

(i) Why did the USA, Britain and the Soviet Union conclude the Nuclear Test Ban treaty?

- (a) The Second Berlin Crisis demonstrated to both the Soviet Union and Western governments the dangers of nuclear war.
- (b) More important still was the impact of the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. Khrushchev placed nuclear weapons in Cuba, only 90 miles from the American coast. He offered to withdraw them only if the US removed its nuclear weapons from Turkey. Kennedy refused and the world was on the brink of nuclear war. Although Khrushchev backed down, the events of October 1962 had a profound effect on the political elites in both the Soviet Union and the West.
- (c) Economic considerations also influenced the decision to negotiate the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Both the United States and the Soviet Union wanted to reduce their huge arms expenditure. Another major drain on the budgets of both countries was the Space Race between the two superpowers. In 1957 the Soviet Union launched a satellite sputnik, in 1959 a Soviet rocket was sent to the moon, while two years later the Soviet astronaut Yuri Gagarin became the first person to undertake a flight into space. The Soviet Union's finances were further stretched by the financial aid it provided to its satellite states.
- (d) Public opinion in the United States opposed nuclear tests.

While Kennedy and Khrushchev began the process of détente, they did not have the opportunity to make further progress because Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963 and Khrushchev deposed in October 1964.

(ii) How successful was Nikita Khrushchev's rule of the Soviet Union?

- (a) Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinisation contributed to the Hungarian Uprising. After the Uprising he reintroduced repressive policies.
- (b) Khrushchev's attempt to take over West Berlin failed.
- (c) His precipitation of the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.
- (d) However, through his policy of 'peaceful co-existence', he did attempt to begin the process of détente, a policy which was continued by his successor Leonid Brezhnev.



E. The foreign policy of the Soviet Union and Western governments 1964-1979

Brezhnev was the first Soviet leader who had spent his whole life under a Soviet Communist regime. In an attempt to prevent future Soviet leaders from having the same monopoly on power Khrushchev had enjoyed, Brezhnev was appointed as Party First Secretary, while Alexei Kosygin was made Prime Minister. At home Brezhnev halted the process of de-Stalinisation and a comparison of his foreign policy with that of Khrushchev reveals both continuity and change. Soviet foreign policy under Brezhnev was more cautious than under Khrushchev, since the Cuban Missile Crisis had demonstrated the risk of the outbreak of nuclear war. Another difference was that, while Khrushchev placed a heavy reliance on nuclear weapons, Brezhnev paid more attention than his predecessor to conventional weapons.

(i) The aims and motives of Soviet foreign policy under Brezhnev

Although the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev remained ideologically committed to Communism, Soviet foreign policy in the period 1964-1979 was influenced primarily by economic and, above all, security considerations.

- (a) Brezhnev, like Khrushchev, wanted détente with the West but, before embarking on this policy, he was determined to establish military parity with the United States in both the quality and quantity of its weapons in order to be able to negotiate from a position of equality. The years 1964-1967 therefore witnessed an arms build-up in the Soviet Union. This was a potentially risky strategy since it was widely viewed in the West as evidence of future Soviet aggression. This was true, for example, of the defensive system erected around Moscow which some Western politicians regarded as evidence that the USSR was preparing for nuclear war.
- (b) In spite of the concerns of Western governments, security considerations were paramount in Brezhnev's eyes. He advocated détente primarily in order to gain formal recognition from the USA and other members of NATO of the post-war territorial settlement. In order to achieve this objective Brezhnev was willing to accept the existence of NATO and the continuing presence of the United States in Europe.
- (c) Against a background of deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Washington's closer relationship with China, Brezhnev feared that the Soviet Union might be isolated by an alliance between China and the USA. He hoped to avert this risk by establishing better relations with the United States.
- (d) Another indication of the importance Brezhnev attached to security was his concern to retain the loyalty of the Soviet Union's satellite states.
- (e) The Soviet Union's very high military expenditure, especially in the second half of the 1960s, placed huge strains on its economy and Brezhnev therefore sought to pursue a policy of détente in order to reduce the cost of its military forces.
- (f) The Soviet economy in the early 1970s was weak and there was widespread dissatisfaction with the standard of living. To improve this situation, Brezhnev wanted to expand Soviet trade with the West and acquire Western technology, especially from the United States and West Germany.



(ii) The aims and motives of US foreign policy in Europe 1964-1979

Although Richard Nixon, who became US President in 1969, advocated a policy of détente with the Soviet Union, he did so for tactical as opposed to ideological reasons:

- (a) The initiative for détente was taken by the West German government under Willy Brandt. Nixon supported Brandt's policies because he wanted to ensure that the US retained leadership of the Western Alliance and controlled the process of détente.
- (b) Nixon was anxious to preserve the unity of the Atlantic Alliance and was concerned at President de Gaulle's decision to remove France from NATO's military structure in 1966.
- (c) Nixon's main worry in 1969 was the US involvement in the Vietnam War. None of the United States' European allies contributed to the Vietnam War and there were huge demonstrations against it throughout Western Europe. As Allan Todd argued: 'Détente appealed to the USA as they felt it might help to resolve problems elsewhere – such as Vietnam'.
- (d) The United States' military expenditure was huge and for Nixon one of the attractions of détente was to reduce the cost of its military commitments in Europe, thus placating public opinion at home. In short, domestic and economic considerations also influenced Nixon's support for détente.
- (e) Nixon regarded détente as a means of preventing a large Soviet military build-up and was in many respects a continuation of Kennan's containment strategy.

(iii) Threats to Soviet domination of Eastern Europe 1964-1970

During the first six years of Brezhnev's rule, the Soviet Union encountered several threats to its control of Eastern Europe. Under Tito's leadership, Yugoslavia continued to pursue an independent line, while economically motivated disturbances broke out in Poland in 1970. However, Rumania and, in particular, Czechoslovakia posed the greatest threat to Soviet control of Eastern Europe.

(a) Rumania

Rumania posed a threat to the Kremlin because it increasingly pursued independent policies. In 1964 its then leader, Gheorge Gheorgiu-Dej, refused to supply large quantities of raw materials to Moscow. Meanwhile, his successor, Nicolae Ceaușescu established diplomatic relations with the GFR in April 1967 against the wishes of the Kremlin and in August 1968 refused to take part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

(b) Czechoslovakia

Events in Czechoslovakia in 1968 followed a very similar pattern to those in Hungary in 1956. In response to Czechoslovakia's deteriorating economic position, the Czech leader, Antonin Novotny, with the Kremlin's approval, introduced economic, social and political reforms in 1965-1966. In addition, universities were granted more freedom and there was less censorship. But, having raised expectations, Novotny provoked widespread anger by attempting to halt the growing liberalisation process. He was replaced by Alexander Dubček in January 1968. In order to promote 'socialism with a human face', Dubček relaxed restrictions on freedom of speech and of the press, removed limitations on foreign travel and liberalised the economy. These developments became known as the 'Prague Spring'. From January to July 1968, it became increasingly clear that Dubček



had lost control of the reform movement he had promoted. Brezhnev was alarmed by these developments and feared that, if Eastern European governments followed Czechoslovakia's example, it might lead to the collapse of the Soviet Empire. Against this background, the Soviet leader, after much hesitation, sanctioned an invasion and on 20-21 August some 400,000 predominantly Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia. The troops encountered almost no resistance and the death toll was confined to about 80. Dubček was replaced in April 1969 by the hardliner Gustáv Husák and his reforms were gradually withdrawn.

(iv) The response of Western governments to the invasion of Czechoslovakia

In 1968, as in 1956, the response of the Western political elites to the events of August 1968 was restrained and pragmatic. Western politicians publicly denounced the Soviet invasion and expressed solidarity with the Czechoslovakian people but were unwilling to go any further. While aiming to exploit the Soviet actions for propaganda purposes, Western governments were not willing to undertake military action for fear of escalating the crisis. They accepted that Eastern Europe formed part of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. It should also be borne in mind that the United States was heavily engaged in Vietnam at that time. Western governments were also anxious that the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia did not hinder the progress of détente.

(v) Attitudes in Eastern Europe to the events in Czechoslovakia

The crushing of the Prague Spring attracted a negative response in Eastern Europe. In September 1968 Albania withdrew from the Warsaw Treaty Organisation. In Rumania Ceauşescu described the invasion of Czechoslovakia as a 'day of shame', while Tito was equally damning in his assessment of the Soviet action. In the Soviet Union, the writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn and the physicist Andrei Sakharov spoke out against the Brezhnev government. There was deep disillusionment and anger in Czechoslovakia itself which, after all, had been one of the most pro-Russian members of the Soviet bloc. This was symbolised by Jan Palach, who set himself alight in Wenceslas Square in Prague in January 1969 in protest at the Soviet invasion.

(vi) The Brezhnev Doctrine

The Soviet Union justified its invasion of Czechoslovakia by what became known as the 'Brezhnev Doctrine'. Published in November 1968, the doctrine maintained that it was the duty of all Communist states in Eastern Europe, in particular the Soviet Union, to intervene against any 'socialist country' which threatened to turn towards capitalism. It represented an unambiguous warning to any Communist state which might have contemplated following the same line as Alexander Dubček in Czechoslovakia.

F. The implementation of détente

(i) Ostpolitik

West Germany was the moving force behind Ostpolitik (meaning 'policy towards the East'). Since December 1955 the Bonn government had followed the so-called Hallstein Doctrine, which declared that West Germany would break off diplomatic relations with any country which recognised East Germany. However, when, in 1969, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), led by Willy Brandt, came to power in Germany for the first time since the Second



World War, it abandoned this policy in favour of 'change through rapprochement'. This phrase, which was first articulated by Egon Bahr in July 1963, suggested that the West aimed to bring about change in Eastern Europe by establishing closer relations with it. Brandt also wanted to improve the lives of the East Germans and hoped that, by building up trust, Ostpolitik would pave the way for the eventual reunification of Germany. Brandt's Ostpolitik comprised four treaties signed between 1970 and 1973:

- (a) The Moscow Treaty between the GFR and the Soviet Union, signed on 12 August 1970, recognised Europe's post-war borders, while not precluding the unification of Germany.
- (b) The Warsaw Treaty between the GFR and Poland, signed on 7 December 1970, accepted the Oder-Neisse line as Poland's Western frontier.
- (c) The Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin, signed by the four wartime Allies on 3 September 1971, guaranteed civilian access to West Berlin but it did not form part of West Germany.
- (d) The Basic Treaty, signed by the GFR and the GDR in December 1972, stipulated that both states would respect each other's borders and develop a good working relationship.

Ostpolitik contributed significantly to easing tension between the Soviet Union and Western European governments and both the GFR and GDR obtained tangible benefits. The GFR achieved its aim of making West Berlin more secure. Despite the efforts of the GDR government to limit contacts between East and West Germans, Ostpolitik also led to a significant rise in the number of West Germans visiting their relatives in the GDR. The benefits Ostpolitik brought for the GDR were arguably even greater since the West German government had effectively recognised East Germany's borders and therefore its right to exist. While this represented a permanent concession, the benefits the GFR hoped to gain were at least partly dependent on the spirit in which the GDR implemented the terms of the Basic Treaty. The GDR also gained more benefit from the increase in trade between the two German states.

(ii) SALT 1

Following three years of negotiations, President Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT 1) in Moscow on 26 May 1972. This treaty limited the number of sea and land-based ballistic missiles each side possessed.

(iii) The Helsinki Accords 1975

From 1972 to 1975 a conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) held negotiations in Helsinki on security, the economy and human rights and in the summer of 1975 35 countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union, reached agreement. The most important aspect of the agreement was an acceptance by all the signatories that Europe's post-war borders could only be altered by peaceful means. The accords also made provision for technology transfers and financial credits, as well as greater respect for human rights.

**(iv) Which side gained most from the Helsinki Accords?**

There is general agreement that, from a diplomatic and economic perspective, the Soviet Union derived greater benefit from the Helsinki Accords than Western governments. In fact, Ray Pearson has argued that the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 'represented no less than a triumph for the Brezhnev regime'.

- (a) The West's recognition in the Helsinki Accords of Europe's post-war borders fulfilled an objective the Soviet Union had been pursuing since the end of the Second World War.
- (b) Détente certainly led to a sharp increase in trade between the Soviet Union and the West. In fact, the value of trade between the USA and the Soviet Union went up from 220 million dollars in 1971 to 2.8 billion dollars in 1978. This was of more benefit to the Soviet Union than the West.
- (c) The main gain the Western governments hoped to achieve by signing the Helsinki Accords was to improve human rights in the Soviet bloc. This did not happen but, by signing the Helsinki Final Act which provided for the observance of human rights, Brezhnev inadvertently encouraged the growth of dissidents in Eastern Europe and established in international law a standard by which human rights abuses could be judged. In other words, the Helsinki Accords provided the foundation for legitimate opposition to the Kremlin. The most notable dissident in the Soviet Union itself was Andrei Sakharov, the highly respected nuclear scientist whose criticism of the Soviet leadership won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975. In Czechoslovakia, a group of dissidents, led by the playwright Václav Havel, established a movement called Charter 77 in Prague to monitor the implementation of human rights. Sakharov was forced into internal exile, while Havel spent four years in prison.

While the Soviet and Western European governments reacted positively to the Helsinki Accords, the US government greeted them with little enthusiasm. Its position in 1975 was weak following President Nixon's resignation in 1974 as a result of the Watergate affair, US withdrawal from the disastrous Vietnam War in 1973 and the severe economic recession which hit the United States in 1974-1975.

5. Soviet aggression, decline and collapse 1979-1991

A. The deterioration in relations between the Soviet Union and Western governments 1979-1985

(i) The reasons for the end of détente and the onset of the 'Second Cold War'

While the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 25 December 1979 was the immediate cause of the breakdown of détente, there were a number of underlying reasons for the increasingly strained relations between the Soviet Union and Western governments in the second half of the 1970s and the early 1980s.



- (a) Throughout the 1970s there had been influential critics of détente in both Washington and Moscow. For example, in the United States Senator Henry Jackson and the Defence Secretary James Schlesinger were highly critical of the process. In the Soviet Union, Defence Minister Marshal Dmitri Ustinov and the long-standing Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko were also sceptical about the benefits of détente.
- (b) Even in the mid-1970s, when the Helsinki Accords were signed, the Kremlin decided to locate new intermediate nuclear weapons in the centre of Europe, a decision which prompted concern in Western capitals.
- (c) Global Soviet expansionism in countries such as Vietnam, Iraq and Yemen provoked widespread unease in Washington which had a negative effect on the USA's relations with the Soviet Union in Europe. Similarly, the Kremlin was suspicious of the friendly relations between the USA and China.
- (d) Support for Soviet dissidents from the West, especially the USA under the administration of President Carter, was strongly resented in Moscow.
- (e) Détente was a key issue in the US Presidential Election, held in November 1980. The Republican candidate, Ronald Reagan, who won a convincing victory, vigorously attacked President Carter's support for détente, describing it as evidence of weakness.
- (f) There is no doubt, however, that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was the most important reason for the end of détente. The invasion was partly motivated by economic considerations since Afghanistan was rich in gas fields. However, security was the main concern since the Soviet leadership feared that Hafizullah Amin, who had seized power in September 1979, appeared to be pro-American. Another factor was the fear that the Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan might spread to Muslims in the Soviet Union. The United States responded more forcefully than the Soviet leadership had expected, providing 3.2 billion dollars to finance the Mujahideen rebels who engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

(ii) The impact of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the outbreak of the Second Cold War on its relations with the USA 1979-1985

- (a) Carter and Brezhnev signed SALT II in Vienna in June 1979 but it was never ratified by the US Senate due to events in Afghanistan.
- (b) Both the United States and the Soviet Union employed sport as an instrument of foreign policy. In response to the invasion of Afghanistan, the US government decided to boycott the Olympic Games in Moscow in 1980, while the Soviet Union reciprocated by boycotting the Olympic Games held in Los Angeles in 1984.
- (c) The United States introduced an embargo on exporting grain and technology to the Soviet Union.
- (d) Ronald Reagan, who served as US President from 1981 to 1989, was strongly influenced by ideological considerations. He was stridently anti-Communist, describing the Soviet Union in March 1983 as an 'Evil Empire'. During his first term in office he had little time for détente. In response to the Soviet Union's development of SS-20 missiles, Reagan supported the deployment of Cruise and Pershing II missiles in the German Federal Republic. He also took a hard line with the Soviet Union over its proposed invasion of Poland which may have influenced Brezhnev's ultimate decision not to intervene militarily. To sum up, Reagan's first term in office witnessed a huge rise in defence expenditure and by 1989 the US military budget was 43 per cent higher than at the peak of the Vietnam War.



- (e) The death of Brezhnev in November 1982, after a long period of poor health, did not bring about an improvement in US-Soviet relations. His successor, Yuri Andropov, was already unwell when he became Soviet leader and died in February 1984. Chairman of the KGB since 1967, Andropov was terrified that Reagan was planning a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union and the US President's rhetoric exacerbated these fears. Reagan's most controversial idea was his Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) which proposed the erection of defences against enemy missiles. This proposal, articulated in a speech on American television on 23 March 1983, caused panic in Moscow, especially since Soviet computer technology lagged well behind that in the United States. The Kremlin's dread of an imminent nuclear attack led to a major diplomatic incident in September 1983 when the Soviet air force shot down a civilian airliner from South Korea which had drifted by mistake into Soviet airspace. In fact, during the autumn of 1983 the world came closer to a nuclear war than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis and, as in 1962, it was caused by a misperception of the other side's intentions.

(iii) The Soviet Union and events in Poland 1980-1981

With the exception of the Soviet Union itself, Poland was the largest and most heavily populated country in Eastern Europe, as well as having a long history of opposition to foreign rule. The Polish people also had a stronger national identity than any of the other states in Eastern Europe. For these reasons, Soviet leaders were justifiably wary of potential unrest in Poland. In December 1970, for example, workers in Gdansk and Gdynia were shot by the army during protests about food shortages. By the summer of 1980 the mood among the Polish people was one of anger and disenchantment as their government increased the cost of basic foodstuffs. Nationalist sentiments had been reinforced by the election in September 1978 of the Bishop of Krakow as Pope John Paul II and the enthusiastic response he received when he visited Poland in June 1979 demonstrated the deeper loyalty of the Polish people to the Catholic Church in Rome than the Communist regime in Warsaw. Against this background Lech Walesa, a former electrician, founded Solidarity, an independent trade union, in Gdansk. During the second half of 1980 Solidarity became a focal point for opposition to Communism and Soviet rule throughout Eastern Europe. A planned invasion by Warsaw Pact troops in December 1980 was averted only when the Polish military assumed control and General Jaruzelski became Prime Minister. In December 1981, he banned Solidarity, ordered the arrest of Walesa and imposed martial law throughout Poland.

(iv) The response of Western European governments to the Second Cold War

The uncompromising attitude of President Reagan to the Soviet Union exposed divisions among Western European governments.

- (a) Under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, British policy towards the Soviet Union was heavily based on ideological considerations. She resolutely supported Reagan's uncompromising attitude to the Soviet Union. Nicknamed by the Kremlin 'the Iron Lady', Thatcher argued for a strong response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, maintaining 'that détente had been ruthlessly used by the Soviets to exploit Western weakness and disarray'.
- (b) France, however, adopted a more relaxed stance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and President Giscard d'Estaing met Brezhnev in Moscow in May 1980.



- (c) The West German government under Chancellor Helmut Schmidt was particularly concerned at the uncompromising policy of President Reagan towards the Soviet Union. This culminated in a serious disagreement over the response of Western governments to events in Poland in 1980-1981, in particular Jaruzelski's imposition of martial law and the banning of Solidarity in 1981. Reagan demanded sanctions against the Soviet bloc, including ending discussions with the Kremlin and withdrawing financial support from the West for a gas and oil pipeline from Siberia to Western Europe. Schmidt was unwilling to agree to these measures because they would jeopardise West Germany's improved relations with the Eastern bloc following Brandt's Ostpolitik, as well as its growing economic links with Eastern European countries.
- (d) The decision to locate Cruise and Pershing II missiles in the German Federal Republic proved highly controversial and prompted huge peace demonstrations in many Western European capitals. In October 1981, some 300,000 people demonstrated against the decision in Bonn, while in April 1983 700,000 participated in peace marches throughout West Germany. This issue also contributed to the electoral success of a new political party, the Greens, which won 27 seats in the General Election held in 1983.

B. The thawing of tensions between the Soviet Union and Western governments and the end of the Cold War 1985-1991

(i) The transformation of Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev

On 11 March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev became the new General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. Aged just 54, he was the youngest Soviet leader since Stalin. Although he oversaw the collapse of the Soviet Empire, Gorbachev was a committed Communist. Although Marxist-Leninist ideology had little influence on his foreign policy, this did not reflect his political beliefs but was a result of the huge domestic and economic challenges he faced. The Soviet Union's economy was in disarray and, as a result, Gorbachev's foreign policy was heavily influenced by domestic and economic considerations:

- (a) The Soviet Union was almost bankrupt. Defence spending accounted for some 25 per cent of Soviet Gross National Product in 1985 and the war in Afghanistan represented a huge drain on the economy. Gorbachev recognised that the Soviet Union was simply unable to compete in an arms race with the United States of America.
- (b) The standard of living of the population was very low. Soviet agriculture and industry were both outdated and inefficient, while the Soviet Union could not compete with the technological advances taking place in the West. In an attempt to overcome this problem, Gorbachev introduced a policy of *perestroika* which involved the introduction of fundamental Western-style economic reforms and *glasnost*, a policy of greater transparency. The explosion at the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl on 26 April 1986 had a deep effect on Gorbachev and convinced him of the need for greater openness and accountability.
- (c) There was increasing dissatisfaction in the Soviet satellite states. Although the Soviet government gave the military regime of General Jaruzelski a subsidy of 2 billion dollars per year in order to maintain political stability in Poland, the banned trade union Solidarity continued to operate underground. Even in the German Democratic Republic, the most prosperous state in the Soviet bloc, the economy was stagnating.



A particular grievance was the shortage of consumer goods and in Leipzig, for example, there was a twelve year waiting list for a new car in 1989.

Against the backdrop of the Soviet Union's severe economic problems, Gorbachev was determined to improve relations with the United States in order to reduce the Soviet defence budget and, despite his deep hostility to the 'Evil Empire', US President Ronald Reagan also favoured better relations with the Soviet Union because the enormous cost of his Star Wars project had also put the American economy under strain. This led to the transformation of Soviet foreign policy from 1985 to 1989.

(ii) Developments in Soviet-US foreign policy relations 1985-1989

- (a) One of Gorbachev's first decisions was to replace Andrei Gromyko, who had served as Foreign Minister since 1957, with Edward Shevardnadze, a moderniser, in July 1985.
- (b) In November 1985 Gorbachev and Reagan discussed the principle of arms reduction at the Geneva Summit, the first Soviet-US summit since 1979.
- (c) Gorbachev and Reagan reached wide-ranging agreement about the elimination of nuclear weapons at the Reykjavik Summit of October 1986 but it ultimately failed because Reagan refused to give up his Star Wars programme.
- (d) In December 1987, the United States and Soviet Union signed the Intermediate Nuclear Force Treaty in Washington which eliminated one group of nuclear weapons. This represented a major concession by Gorbachev since the number of warheads the Soviet Union agreed to scrap was four times higher than the United States.
- (e) At the end of 1987 Gorbachev announced the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The process began in 1988 and was completed by February 1989.
- (f) As early as 1985 Gorbachev had informed the leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries privately that he had abandoned the Brezhnev Doctrine. In other words, if the Soviet satellite states chose to go their own way, the Soviet Union would not intervene militarily. Many of the East European leaders did not take Gorbachev seriously until he delivered a speech to the United Nations on 7 December 1988 formally announcing his intention to reduce Soviet conventional forces by 500,000 men.

(iii) The fall on the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War

Fear of renewed German aggression had represented a key influence on Soviet foreign policy since the Second World War and, when he came to power in 1985, Gorbachev was determined to safeguard the sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and maintain the division of Germany. He reiterated this policy in July 1987, adding that the Berlin Wall would still be present 'in a hundred years'. Although some of Gorbachev's public statements in the next two years suggested a softening of his attitude to the 'German problem', he appeared to rule out German unification altogether at a press conference in Paris on 5 July 1989, maintaining that the division of Germany was an irreversible result of the Second World War.



Even though Gorbachev was fully committed to preserving the GDR, he was highly critical of the repressive and inflexible policies pursued by its leader Erich Honecker, urging him in October 1989 to introduce wide-ranging reforms immediately. Honecker ignored Gorbachev's advice and, with the tacit approval of the Soviet leader, was removed as head of state on 18 October. However, it should be stressed that Gorbachev played no direct part in this dismissal or the momentous events on 9 November 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell.

Egon Krenz, who replaced Honecker as head of state, sought to defuse the growing crisis in the German Democratic Republic not by firing on demonstrators in Leipzig, as Honecker had planned, but by introducing a new Travel Law which would permit East Germans to travel to the West under certain conditions. In the late afternoon on 9 November a draft of the new law was handed to Günter Schabowski, a member of the Politburo, for him to announce at a live televised press conference. Schabowski, who had played no part in drafting the law and had only skimmed through it on the way to the press conference, stated that GDR citizens would be able to leave for the West through the border crossings. In response to a question from an Italian journalist about when this law would come into effect, Schabowski, visibly embarrassed, looked hurriedly through his papers and wrongly announced 'at once'. Only a few minutes later crowds began to gather at the border crossings in East Berlin demanding to be allowed entry into West Berlin. The border guards had no instructions and their attempts to seek guidance from their superiors were in vain. Eventually, the guards at the crossing points felt that they could wait no longer and opened the crossing points to thousands of ecstatic East Berliners who flooded into West Berlin. Meanwhile, Gerhard Lauter, the official responsible for drafting the travel law, spent the evening at the theatre, blissfully unaware of the unfolding events at the border crossings! When he returned home, his son informed him that his boss had rung on numerous occasions and, incidentally, the Berlin Wall was open! It was never closed again and the unification of the two German states was formally ratified on 3 October 1990. Gorbachev only learnt about the fall of the Wall when he awoke the following morning.

The opening of the Berlin Wall had a dramatic impact on the other states of the Soviet Empire. In November 1989 the Communist government in Prague was overthrown in the so-called 'Velvet Revolution'. In the same month, Lech Walesa, the leader of Solidarity, became Poland's first non-Communist President since the Second World War. In Bulgaria the Communist government under Todor Zhivkov was removed from office in November 1989, while the Rumanian leader Nicolae Ceauşescu was murdered by the army on Christmas Day 1989. In 1991, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania became independent and Gorbachev resigned on 25 December 1991.



Web Video

For contemporary footage of the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjNz1lvXgzU>

(iv) The response of Western governments to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany

The unification of Germany revealed significant divisions among Western governments. While the United States supported unification from the outset, Italy, France and, in particular, Britain were opposed to the prospect of a unified Germany.

President George Bush made it clear to Gorbachev at the Malta Summit in December 1989 that, while he would not seek to undermine the position of the Soviet leader, he nonetheless felt compelled to support the unification of Germany. Bush was determined



to end the division of Germany because it would symbolise the United States' victory in the Cold War. The positive attitude of Bush to German unification also reflected the fact that, unlike France and the Soviet Union, the US had not been suffered Nazis occupation during the war years or experienced the heavy bomb damage inflicted on British cities. While German unity weakened the global standing of both France and Britain, it did not jeopardise the United States' status as a most powerful country in the world. Bush also expected that the United States would derive trade and commercial gains from the unification of Germany.

On the other hand, the French Government under President Mitterrand was fearful of German unity and sought to delay or even stop the process. Mitterrand believed that German unification would diminish the importance of France as a global power and reduce its influence in a European Community dominated by Germany. Historical memories also exerted a powerful influence on French attitudes towards German unification. As a result of the wars of 1870-1871, 1914-1918 and 1939-1945, the political elites in Paris remained deeply fearful of German military aggression. In fact, in 1991 Mitterrand updated France's short-range nuclear weapons which, with a range of no more than 480 kilometres, had Germany as one of the very few possible targets. Remembering the Treaty of Rapallo, Mitterrand expressed disquiet about the settlement between Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl at Stravopol in July 1990.

The British Government under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was also stridently opposed to German unification, maintaining that it might lead to a resurgence of nationalism in the newly united Germany. Thatcher believed that there was a fundamental flaw in the German national character and Germans were innately aggressive, even though there had been no sign of this trait since 1945. Like its French counterpart, the British Government was also alarmed at the prospect of the emergence of Germany as an economic superpower and this apprehension was exacerbated by Kohl's enthusiasm for European economic and monetary union. In fact, Nicholas Ridley, the Minister for Trade and Industry, gave an interview with the Spectator magazine in which he claimed that Germany in the 1990s was seeking to achieve by economic means the same objectives Hitler failed to attain by military methods during the Second World War.

The unification of Germany on 3 October represented a triumph for the United States because it had come about in spite of the opposition of three of the four wartime Allies. The low key approach adopted by President Bush was vindicated by the fact that, even though Gorbachev eventually agreed to the unified Germany becoming a member of NATO, he was not deposed by his hard-line critics in the Kremlin.

(v) The reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Empire in Eastern Europe and the USSR itself by 1991

- (a) The economic predicament in which the Soviet Union found itself was a key factor in its collapse. When Gorbachev came to power some 25 per cent of the Soviet Union's Gross National Product was spent on arms, while the majority of Soviet citizens experienced economic hardship.
- (b) Gorbachev failed to learn the lessons of 1953, 1956 and 1968. He recognised the need to introduce wide-ranging reforms in the Soviet Union but his policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* actually worsened the situation and the Soviet people took advantage of the freedom he granted them to bring down the Soviet Empire.



- (c) The United States ruthlessly exploited the Soviet Union's economic weakness. President Reagan had excellent intelligence about the economic plight of the Soviet Union and knew that it could no longer compete militarily with the United States.
- (d) The United States helped to undermine the Soviet Empire by providing financial assistance to its satellite states. As early as 1956, the US had given Poland an economic aid package after the peaceful resolution of the unrest and this policy was extended to other Soviet satellite states from 1980 onwards. For example, in June 1989 President Bush offered Hungary 'most favoured nation' trade status in return for the introduction of economic and political reforms. Similarly, the German Democratic Republic was heavily dependent on economic aid from West Germany.
- (e) United States' foreign policy under President Reagan went 'beyond containment'. Reagan was a tough negotiator, epitomised by his persistent refusal to give up his Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) programme and his speech at the Brandenburg Gate on 12 June 1987 when he demanded that Gorbachev 'tear down this wall'.
- (f) The Soviet Empire was inherently unstable. It comprised fifteen different republics which included many different ethnic groups and cultures.



Web Article

For an interview with Gorbachev on the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet empire, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/16/gorbachev-guardian-interview>.



Teaching and Learning Activity

Questions for discussion:

1. What were the main successes and failures of Soviet foreign policy in the period 1917-1991?
2. What were the main successes and failures of the foreign policy of Western governments in the period 1917-1991?

