

Soviet american
detente the cold war
a comparison politics
essay



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Topic 2: Despite initial hopes, the Soviet-American détente of the 1970's had collapsed by the end of the decade. However, by the end of the 1980's, a final end to the Cold War was in the making. What accounts for the difference? Look at elements from each level of analysis for a possible explanation.

When we think of the Cold War, we think of a scary time in history. We think of two great powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, always ready to go to war, always ready to launch nuclear weapons to annihilate each other. What many don't know is in the 46 years of the war, there were several times when the two countries had a détente and were working towards an alliance. Towards the end of the 1970s, however, the détente that had formed was on the verge of collapsing and did so into the early 1980s. However, a few years later, by the end of the 1980s, there was an end to the Cold War. Different levels of analysis can account for the collapse of the détente and the eventual end to the Cold War.

President Kennedy had given his famous American University Speech in June of 1963 and a month later Khrushchev had offered a Limited Test Ban Treaty. This was the first time the Soviet Union had accepted a test ban treaty since Eisenhower first proposed it. Years later, America and the Soviet Union had begun talks on SALT I in November of 1969. The treaty was the first to limit the number of ICBMs and actually freeze it to the number each country had at the time. It was an agreement not to have a defense against nuclear weapons, limiting the number of ABMs to just two sites per country. This would ensure MAD or mutual assured destruction for both countries because they no longer had a way to defend themselves against nuclear attacks. MAD

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made the citizen of each country the hostage of the other. There was a shift from nuclear deterrence to a common understanding of a need to control the arms race and détente.

The United States felt a calm for some time not having to directly worry of an attack from the Soviet Union. There had been a Basic Principles Agreement signed by both countries. What the agreement said was that there would be a peaceful coexistence and that would be the basis of U. S-Soviet relations and that both countries were “swearing off efforts to obtain unilateral advantages” (Lecture notes). The Soviets interpreted this as there was an acceptance of the Soviet Union as a global power and that they were free to aid revolutionary states and that the U. S support for counterrevolution was contained. The United States, however, interpreted the BPA differently. They did not accept the Soviet interpretation that it was free to support revolutionary forces and did not accept that there was a containment of the United State’s counterrevolution policy. The United States was the first to violate the treaty when it did not allow the Soviet Union to participate in the peace talks between Egypt and Israel. Then the Soviet Union violated the treaty in Africa.

When Jimmy Carter became president, he was determined to set himself apart from the previous administrations. Both the individual level of analysis and state level can account for his change in foreign policy. He changed U. S. foreign policy from that of containment to a foreign policy based on human rights. He was no longer interested in pursuing détente. When he came into office, he gave a speech saying,

“ The time had come, to move beyond the belief that Soviet expansion was almost inevitable, but that it must be contained.” To move beyond that “ inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear... (Gaddis pg. 343)”

The systemic level of analysis can be used to explain the Soviet Union's reaction to President Carter's policy on human rights. The systemic level shows us what affect the U. S. foreign policy had on the domestic policies of the Soviet Union. While the U. S. and USSR were moving towards détente, the Soviet Union stepped up internal repression on its citizens (lecture notes). The problem, however, with pursuing human rights and distancing the United States from violators of human rights was that the U. S. needed to maintain a good relationship with regimes and countries that were violating human rights. We were dependent on oil, therefore needed to remain friendly with Saudi Arabia. We needed to remain friendly with China in order to use China as a threat against the Soviets.

President Carter's human rights foreign policy was implemented in Iran, Nicaragua, El Salvador as well as Africa. The United States had troops in Nicaragua during the 1930s. Wanting to remove the troops, the U. S. helped to establish the Somoza regime. During 1979, the Nicaraguan Revolution was replaced the Somoza regime with the leftist Sandinistas (FSLN). The Carter administration had tried for months to get Somoza to leave in the hope that the liberal bourgeoisie would assume power; it failed (Snyder pg. 279). The U. S. believed that it should support the new regimes and established ties with it. The U. S. believed that the regime should receive the benefit of the doubt, that Washington's influence can direct the revolution in <https://assignbuster.com/soviet-american-detente-the-cold-war-a-comparison-politics-essay/>

a positive direction; and that the U. S. owed the Nicaraguan people its help in reconstructing their devastated country following decades of Washington's support of the corrupt Somoza Family (Snyder pg. 279) 1. Washington provided monetary aid to Nicaragua on the condition that it did not support hard line Marxist rebels in El Salvador. The Sandinistas supported the Salvadoran guerrillas for ideological reasons. This policy brought Nicaragua into conflict with the U. S., and made it much easier to justify internal pressure of the bourgeoisie, whom the U. S. supported.

During the Cold War, India had attempted to align itself with the Soviet Union in response to the Washington's support for Pakistan and China. The United States had aligned itself with Pakistan as a way to help contain Soviet-friendly India and to use Pakistan in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation at the time.

The Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979. However, a year earlier, in 1978, Afghanistan's government had secured a treaty with the Soviet Union that allowed them to call on the Soviets for help. This wasn't the first time that the Soviet Union had helped in Afghanistan. The reason the Afghani government needed Soviet assistance was that the Taraki government had initiated a series of reforms. Thousands of prisoners were executed, including many village mullahs. This caused parts of the country into rebellion. The Afghani government called on its Soviet allies for assistance.

The United States responded to the Soviets by supporting the Afghans. The U. S. began training insurgents and directing propaganda broadcasts into Afghanistan from Pakistan. The United States started to provide financial aid

to Pakistan, who in turn provided aid to the mujahedeen. The United States was worried about the Soviets spreading their communism, but more worried that the USSR would gain access to the Indian Ocean by coming to an agreement with Pakistan. Historians say that Afghanistan was the Soviet Union's Vietnam.

Another reason for the collapse to détente was arms control. Although SALT I had been signed and there was a ban on ICBMs and ABMs, there was no ban on the technological arms race. Arms control was not enough to solve the mistrust of the two nations and to bring an end to the cold war. The systemic level of analysis can best explain the threat seen by a lack of arms control. The Soviets had deployed their SS-20, which were ICBMs, and replaced all their IRBMs in Europe. Through the security dilemma, we see that although the Soviets might not have intended to be a threat, their steps towards the ability to better defend themselves were seen as a threat. In response to the SS-20 deployment, NATO decided to deploy U. S. Pershing II and Tomahawk missiles to defend its allies in case of an attack. President Carter had pulled out of the SALT II negotiations over concern of the Soviet ICBMs and domestic policies of human rights. With a large portion of the Soviet budget spent on defense, the economy was on the verge of collapsing. Its vast growing Soviet economy had come to a standstill because it was over extended and weakening. After they invaded Afghanistan, they had isolated themselves with few "real friends."

From the mid 1980s until 1991, we saw a change in Soviet foreign policy.

The end of the Cold War could be seen and the tension felt around the world was slowly going away. Ronald Reagan was in his second term of presidency <https://assignbuster.com/soviet-american-detente-the-cold-war-a-comparison-politics-essay/>

in the United States and in 1985, the communist party in Russia elected Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev wanted a peaceful international environment in which he could carry out his reforms. He was influenced by the reforms made in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s. He wanted to end the Soviet Union's isolationism and make the Soviet economy more efficient. He wanted the Soviet Union to be democratic socialism.

To achieve his goals, Gorbachev used the GRIT strategy. He initiated three major policies along with GRIT. The first was the policy of Perestroika. This was the restructuring of the economy (lecture), best explained by the state level of analysis. He created a new foreign policy team by firing Gromyko who was known for being oppositional and hiring Edward Shevardnadze who was known for being a human being. Almost immediately, Shevardnadze embarked on Arms Control. On July 30, 1985, the USSR passed a Nuclear Testing Moratorium. The stopped all underground testing of nuclear weapons and invited the United States to do the same, but did not demand that they do. They maintained the moratorium for 17 months even though the U. S. did not reciprocate. Shevardnadze also offered a 30% unilateral arms reduction and the Strategic Defense Initiative. What the SDI did was it observed the ABM Treaty for another 15 years. Regan had proposed an SDI in 1983 as a way to make nuclear weapons obsolete, but it was refused by the USSR out of fear that the U. S. had better technologies, an advantage with computers, and more money; and would be able to develop better weapons in an Arms

Race. However, at a summit in Geneva, Regan and Gorbachev didn't reach an agreement, mainly due to the SDI issue.

The next policy he implemented was Glasnost (lecture), or openness. It undermined the regime legitimacy and strengthened socialism by criticism of the Brezhnev era 'stagnation' (lecture). He gave people freedoms such as the freedom of speech. His hopes were to start debate between the conservative communists and himself in order to bring public opinion in favor of his reforms. We also saw Gorbachev's Demokratizatsiia. Gorbachev's intention was to introduce multi-candidate elections; however, it started multi-party elections.

During the 27th Party Congress, Gorbachev announced to the world his 'new thinking.' This was all based on the individual level of analysis. He drew his ideas from a small group of intellectuals who had lost their jobs because their ideas were too radical and from Khrushchev's ideas. He said that states and countries needed to get together to help solve global problems such as hunger. He said that all states should have the freedom of choice to choose their own regime and way of life. He recognized that security was a political problem and could not be solved by military means and that no state could protect itself through military means in a nuclear world. Gorbachev also mentioned that in relations to the U. S and the USSR, security could only be mutual, that there could never be security for the USSR without security for the U. S. Gorbachev recognized the security dilemma and was willing to negotiate and compromise. He changed the Soviet military strategy to that of a defensive strategy ready to protect itself, rather than an offensive strategy ready to fight. In a speech to the UN in December of 1988, <https://assignbuster.com/soviet-american-detente-the-cold-war-a-comparison-politics-essay/>

Gorbachev said there needed to be new principles for a new world. He mentioned that foreign policy should be deideologized and demilitarized meaning ideology and the threat of military force should be removed from foreign policy and that all nations had the right of self determination. The significance of this can be seen through the state level of analysis because it shows that the Soviet Union would stop forcing communism on other nations and that they wouldn't interfere if a communist nation overthrew the communist regime. The first to implement reforms were Hungary and Poland.

Gorbachev knew that in order for people to believe him, he would need to start making concessions. He withdrew 500, 000 troops from Eastern Europe and 5, 000 tanks. He openly encouraged reform in Eastern Europe, trying to make socialism more democratic in the USSR.

President Regan had recognized the change in the direction of the Soviet Union. Wanting to encourage the Soviet leader to pursue arms agreements, Regan shifted to diplomacy. Gorbachev and Regan held four summit conferences. During these conferences, they signed a, Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty which eliminated missiles with a range of 310-3, 400 miles and signed a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty which reduced weapons to 1, 600 launcher vehicles and 6, 000 warheads.

Gorbachev was singlehandedly responsible for the end of the Cold War. With his style of ' new thinking' and implementing his policies, it created a sense of ease for everyone. According to the realists, anyone in Gorbachev's position would have done the same the same thing. We saw how each level of analysis explained the collapse of the détente and how each level

explained the return of détente and the end of the Cold War. The ideologies of each government played a key role in the collapse of détente; The Soviets wanting to spread Sovietology and the lack of trust from the American government and wanting to stop the spread of Sovietology. Also, we saw through the individual level of analysis that both Regan and Gorbachev wanted to end the Cold War, and Gorbachev took the first real step forward with his reforms and ideas to do so.