

How mikhail
gorbachev and ronald
reagan mutually
ended the cold war



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Rewriting the Past Through Conflict and Compromise: How Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan Mutually Ended the Cold War

In today's society, where "tension" and "peace" appears to be subjective issues, it is challenging to recognize that only a mere 30 years ago, the world was passing through its most apprehensive period: the Cold War. Tensions had been brewing since the end of World War II and augmented to unparalleled levels under the Cold War. The Cold War originated from political, economic, and social ideological differences between America and the Soviet Union, sprouting to a conflict over the ideal method to govern post-war Europe. Was the red wave of Soviet communism to sweep Europe, or would the western policy of containment shape Europe's future? For many years, this was the key issue that divided leaders on both factions from arriving at a mutually beneficial agreement, adding to years of sustained hostility. This begs the question, how was this intense conflict handled by the two main players, Ronald Reagan, and Mikhail Gorbachev, and what resulted from their newfound cooperation?

Western democracies have been contentious to the concept of a communist state for an extended period ("The End of the Cold War"). After the conclusion of World War II, officials at the American Embassy in Moscow reported that the Soviets were determined to expand commission and definitively opposed to the USA and the West as a whole, along with its underlying concepts: capitalism and democracy. American administrators now had the crucial insight into understanding the conundrum the Soviet's posed and Winston Churchill's dire warning of an Iron Curtain descending over Europe drove the panic at home (Hamby). After working jointly to

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defeat the common enemy of Germany in World War II, the leaders of both countries along with China, France, and Great Britain met at the UN Council to decide how to aid post-war Europe. This prompted Stalin to establish communist governments across Eastern Europe. Thus initially, President Truman issued his doctrine to Congress of an interventionist US foreign policy that would restrain the spread of communism around Europe, specifically Greece and Turkey, by spending approximately 400 million in aid for Greek anti-communist forces. Simultaneously, his doctrine extended the US's protection of Turkey, where the Soviet Union was pressuring for the shared authority of the Dardanelles and the subsequent economic policy of the pro-capitalist Marshall Plan. Furthermore, the subsequent divisions in Germany through the symbolic and physical communist barrier of the Berlin Wall and the military alliances-NATO and the Warsaw Pact-only worsened the diplomatic relations between the two sides, since both agreements sought to undermine the sphere of influence and power of the opposing alliance ("NATO")

In fact, the Soviet Union, both parties preferred to establish Germany as a buffer state of West Europe and the Soviet Union combined with Germany divided into four zones after WWII and the western zones aligned by the western powers and the eastern zones. This was because both the Soviet Union and the USA believed that this division would allow their countries to survive as it would cause less conflict between the two. There was a lack of trust on both sides regarding the ability to hold elections. The western powers were troubled by Germany potentially electing a communist government, which would extend the influence of the Iron Curtain that had

placed a military, ideological, and political barrier between the Soviet Union and the “Western” world, while the USSR was concerned with Germany remaining as a capitalist state (Halsall). As both sides did not desire to relinquish power in Germany, they remained in occupation. Unfortunately, both countries now faced an impediment. They had previously worked together to bring peace to Germany after the World War, however, because of the severe ideological differences, the once present trust between the two sides had eroded and had been replaced with a great fear that the other would withdraw from any potential amicable agreement.

Amidst spreading democracy, the Marshall Plan devised a capitalist European economic revival that confirmed the divisions spreading across Europe and inadvertently gave rise to the communist Soviet Union (Weissman). To counter this, American officials devised a new strategy to increase the influence of democracy throughout the other regions of the world, besides Europe, hoping to counteract the growing impact of communism. They culminated this idea into the Bay of Pigs invasion, under the Kennedy Administration, when the CIA tried to overthrow Fidel Castro by landing 1200 disgruntled Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs. Unfortunately for the Americans, this made tensions and the nuclear threat worse, since Castro turned Nikita Khrushchev to position Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba, to avert all future invasion endeavors (“Cold War”). Castro’s increased alignment with the Soviet Union played into their plans. The Soviet Union had been apprehensive to the amount of nuclear arms that were directed at them through US nuclear weapons sites throughout Turkey and Western Europe, for a protected amount of time. Thus, with the opportunity to align with Fidel Castro, a

leader who embraced their ideology of communism, they perceived stationing missiles in Cuba as an advantageous opportunity to not only continue to augment the stronghold of communism, but also as a method to redress the balance in terms of nuclear strength and capability between the United States and Soviet Union.

The United States and the Soviet Union tried to prevent the Cold War from amplifying to a pressing situation, as they knew the calamitous effects of nuclear war on the people, the country, and the world. In order to prevent any potential escalations, President Dwight D. Eisenhower did not send US troops to intervene in the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, as he knew any intervention bared the liability of starting a U. S.-Soviet war that could induce nuclear conformation. Rather, his administration mitigated its rhetoric about sovereignty and conversely affirmed hopes for progressive—and amicable—advancement toward independence (Pach). Similarly, when President Kennedy issued the ultimatum to the Soviet Union for them to withdraw missiles from Cuba and stop the arrival of additional nuclear arms, the Soviet government agreed as they understood that if they failed to abide by this request, President Kennedy would try to overthrow the Castro Regime and lead to a nuclear confrontation. However, while the Soviet Union tried to portray this event as a victory, it brought about the ouster of Khrushchev, and the appointment of his successor, Leonid Brezhnev, who desired to diminish hostility with the United States, a focal objective of the succeeding Soviet Union and American administrations.

The start of minor cooperation, initially led by Nixon's policy of Detente- the period of stable and improved relations between the United States and the <https://assignbuster.com/how-mikhail-gorbachev-and-ronald-reagan-mutually-ended-the-cold-war/>

Soviet Union that Richard Nixon and Leonid I. Brezhnev originally cultivated in the early 1970s- significantly improved pressures of the Cold War between the U. S. and the Soviet Union (Hughes). Moreover, due to increased trade and collaboration with the Soviet Union through decrees such as the SALT I treaty, the Nixon and Brezhnev administrations set the stage for the two main players, Ronald Reagan, and Mikhail Gorbachev, to make new decisions and changes in ideology for diplomatic purposes. With the common goal in mind of potentially ending the threat of a nuclear war, both leaders' recognized an opportunity to deliver a fruitful resolution to a war that had plagued both nations for a sustained period. (" Détente and Arms Control").

Fundamentally, Ronald Reagan's change in US diplomacy towards the USSR was one of the defining factors that helped lead to the US to pursue a peaceful resolution. Towards the ending years of his administration, Reagan abandoned confrontational politics in favor of engaging Mikhail Gorbachev in summit diplomacy that resulted in the INF Treaty, which was effectively the beginning of denuclearization. In fact, as Edwin Meese, Ronald Reagan's Distinguished Fellow Emeritus recounts,

" In the days leading up to that momentous occasion, Reagan told me that he hoped that, in addition to the formal sessions of the summit, he could have a private meeting with Gorbachev. He wanted to establish a personal relationship and to break what he viewed as the " barriers of mistrust that divided our countries. That opportunity came about in the first afternoon of the summit. Reagan suggested to Gorbachev that the two of them go for a walk outside. They strode together to a boathouse near the summit building.

They talked there for nearly two hours, alone except for their interpreters.
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The result was the initiation of a rapport between the two most powerful men on Earth, which developed into respect - even friendship. In this conversation, they also agreed to two more summit meetings — one in Washington and one in Moscow — a result that none of the diplomats of either nation would have thought possible. Thus began a series of meetings that changed the course of history” (Edwin).

Reagan’s will to use his personal diplomacy to create a positive relationship with Gorbachev were the major factors that helped structure the discussions between the two leaders that followed.

Additionally, Reagan did not follow the status quo and operated with an objective mindset. His predecessors such as JFK wanted to eliminate communism from places such as Cuba, through events such as the Bay of Pigs Invasion, to demonstrate to the Soviet Union and the other communist countries under the communist regime that communism was not the optimal government system and thus deter them away from this ideology, resulting at the end of the Cold War (Edmund). However, this only caused the power of communism to grow stronger all over the world since Castro increased the number of nuclear arms as a deterrent to any future invasion. Nonetheless, some progress was made with Nixon’s presidency. He and Brezhnev signed seven agreements that would avoid accidental military confrontations. Thus when Reagan was elected president, he emphasized military preparedness as the focal point to maintain Soviet-American relations, which continued the successful policy of Detente. However, to take the next step, Reagan utilized a different perspective. He could place his interests in the lives of the people rather than the way they were being governed. As a result, he primary

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sought to reduce the threat of war with Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders, rather than seek to alter the ideology of the Soviet Union.

Reagan took the unconventional path of negotiations – not military confrontation like JFK. He composed the root of his strategy for engaging in negotiations and diplomacy with the Soviet Union, and he vigorously followed them throughout his presidency. In fact, the military buildup that was ordered by Reagan was more of a symbol of the potential destruction that the powerful US nuclear weapons could cause on the Soviet Union, thus creating incentives for the Soviets to negotiate with the US. The military buildup essentially created an image of US power and supremacy, which allowed the Reagan Administration to put arms cutback and condensing the vast variety of weapons on both sides to approach a resolution without military confrontation.

Similar to Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev was willing to change the status quo in order to reach a sustainable solution, as for many years, breakthroughs in United States-Soviet relations were always subject to breakdowns. As soon as one thought negotiations between Reagan's predecessors and the former Soviet Union leaders were improving and reaching a peaceful stage, negotiations would breakdown in the form of embargos or unviable agreements such as SALT II, ultimately sustaining the status quo.

Specifically, the SALT II agreement was never ratified by the US Senate since some senators maintained that the treaty did not adequately advance in establishing restraints on weapons and consequently did not serve as a substantial endeavor to ceasing the arms race, while others regarded that

the conditions the treaty situated an excessive amount of restrictions on the <https://assignbuster.com/how-mikhail-gorbachev-and-ronald-reagan-mutually-ended-the-cold-war/>

US and could potentially undermine US commitments, influence, and safety. In fact, the breakdown in these negotiations usually resulted in a series of events that had no output. For example, the Hungarian uprising in 1956, the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the invasions of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the Afghanistan Invasion in 1979. Gorbachev transformed that norm. He sought to guide the Soviet Union into a drastically alternate future, one that would follow a different trajectory from the traditional Soviet command economy. Through Perestroika and Glasnost and drifting away from the Zero-Sum policy that had not positive results for either side throughout the war, he could adequately improve relations with the West (Zubok). He understood that by setting aside 20 percent of the GDP and 40 percent of the already debt filled budget for military, his country would never develop and increase economically, which would be a major blow to the country and the domestic lives of the citizens and thus was not interested in a nuclear conformation (Demikas). As a result, he was keen on ending his country's nuclear rivalry with the United States and pursued negotiations with Reagan.

Additionally, Mikhail Gorbachev's major foreign policy change, which was deemed "new thinking", was a catalyst for change and the change towards a peaceful solution, causing it to have a great effect on the ending of the Cold War. This policy resulted from his idea that security was most possible through cooperation with the USA. Gorbachev believed that human interests take precedence over any other interests since the world was becoming increasingly interactive. In the event of a nuclear war, no winner would emerge, thus engaging in political diplomacy would be the optimal route in comparison to a military stalemate (Kaplan). Therefore, instead of continuing

to build nuclear weapons, he pursued a new policy of sufficiency. The Soviet Union would now only keep nuclear weapons for protection in case of an emergency nuclear attack. Though the Soviet Union did not completely eliminate its nuclear arsenal, the fact that it was taking the steps towards limiting its arsenal and redefining the purpose of its weapons, helped signify a major step forward towards cooperation. These steps helped Gorbachev take necessary action to ensure the safety of his citizens from the threat of nuclear attack from the USA.

With Gorbachev's resolute compliance to discontinue long-held Soviet positions and allow communism to function in a way so it would coexist with the other social systems, he introduced many domestic reforms open to peaceful coexistence with the rest of the world. Prior to the Gorbachev administration, the Soviet Union's economy, specifically the vital agricultural section, began to crumble. The country was deficient in significant technical and industrial improvements and utilized inefficient factories, amid customers purchasing substandard products and in anguish from the deficiency of social privileges, leading to a battered society dominated by labor strikes and discontent civilians. Moreover, considerable amounts of government censorship dismissed the ability of columnists and journalists to expose the flaws of the poor conditions and parts of the government (Gitomirski). Thus, the reforms he introduced came in the form of two new policies: Perestroika and Glasnost. Perestroika is the recreation of the original economic and political system that was initiated by the Communist party (Bentley), while Glasnost is defined as "openness" and intended to grant more rights and freedoms to the Soviet people through introducing

new political and social reforms. This was a major step forward for the Soviet Union and these reforms were instituted as Gorbachev had inherited a dormant economy and a collapsing political system. His programs fixed economic, social, and political problems that had plagued Soviet society, by incorporating a greater amount of American ideals into his new policies (Talbot). It strove to create a more inclusive political process through freedoms present in the Western World such as freedom of speech and expression. Eventually, these two policies helped bring about the decline of the former Soviet Union's and garner towards a peaceful resolution to bring an end to the nuclear threat posed by the Soviet Union.

Consequently, Reagan went through a personal transformation, one which many of his supporters and much of the American public did not immediately realize or support. Reagan understood that the ramifications of Mikhail Gorbachev's unconventional goals for the war could potentially lead to the biggest step forward not only for the Soviet Union but the relations between the Soviet Union and the United States ("Reagan's Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War"). He envisioned the alteration that Gorbachev was planning for his country, and if the transformation was successful, it would not only comply with American interests but would aid with global interests (Foner). He viewed these new reforms and distinct willingness from the Soviet premier as a welcome surprise since the ideology of the Soviet Union was reconstructing into an ideology that would be beneficial to all parties. This diverged from his original hawk stance that was built on to one stifling the Soviets with the sheer power and destructive capabilities of American nukes that he deployed in Western Europe to one that was focused on

negotiating an agreement that would avoid military information and thus the continuation of the Cold War (Kaplan). Rather, he targeted a powerful, continued personal commitment with Gorbachev, assuring Gorbachev that he would have the United States' support in creating the massive alteration for the Soviet Union. This was a step that never came to fruition by Reagan's predecessors and one which allowed Reagan to establish the key personal relationship to help lead to subsequent agreements (Fitzgerald). Even though Reagan had strong anti-communist views and had intensified the Cold War by initiating a buildup of U. S. forces in the early 1980s, the two leaders desired to find common ground for peace for the world ("The End of the Cold War").

With both leaders gaining the courage to meet the common ground and reduce the animosity that had daunted the world for the past 40 years, they indulged in five groundbreaking summits between 1985 and 1988. In preparation for the first summit, Reagan was characterized as the underdog who had the potential to be intimidated and/or deceived by Gorbachev, who was known for his intricate military and technological knowledge ("Reagan's Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War"). The American public and many analysts feared that Reagan could be talked into a deal that would be favorable for the Soviet Union and result in unproductive dialogue. While the first summit in Reykjavik, Iceland did not lead to fruitful results and ended in a standoff, it signified the first step towards establishing a positive relationship between the two superpowers and the potential for achieving a safer, more peaceful world, as it was agreed to in principle to dismantle INF systems from the European continent. Thus, with more interactions and

garnering a better understanding of Gorbachev's style, Reagan practiced with his specialist on Soviet Union affairs, Jack F. Matlock Jr to prepare for the Summit that place in Geneva in November 1985, so that he could progress his relationship, not falter, or take any missteps that would hinder the progress of negotiations between the two sides. This summit was unprecedented and Reagan knew about Gorbachev's mutual interest in achieving peace and a decrease in nuclear tension, consequently he instructed Matlock to play the role of Gorbachev to mimic his style so that Reagan could prepare for his personality and head into the summit with the tools to advance the rapidly developing powerful, yet close friendship with Gorbachev.

Ronald Reagan's strategy for the summit was to identify the areas of similar matters, be open about his main points of controlling and calming down the nuclear arms race, support Gorbachev's goals of creating a new Soviet Union, and back Gorbachev as the leader who would achieve this for the Soviet Union (" Reagan and Gorbachev Hold Their First Summit Meeting"). His outward friendliness from the beginning allowed him to establish a relationship with the Soviet leader that his predecessors could not and promote dialogue between the two countries that would lead to mutual benefits. Gorbachev appreciated this, allowing for him and Reagan to thoroughly settle any potential issues with ease and avoid war. This goal of open dialogue was the goal for every American president after Eisenhower and had finally been achieved through Reagan's diplomacy, with the combination of Gorbachev's similar style and pursuit of goals (Demakis). From these meetings, the leaders of the two countries could reach the

unprecedented signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty at a summit in Washington D. C., in 1987, which brought about a major reduction in both nations' weapons stockpile and effectively marked a halt to the dangerous proceedings (Weisberg).

Although rough foreign relations between the United States and the Soviet Union were present during the 20th century, the constructive discussions and novel thinking on both sides allowed for the protection of the people from the US, Soviet Union, and the rest of the world, because of the threat of a major nuclear war being effectively compromised (Spielvogel). Both leaders were products of a resentful, decades-long bitterness originating from the very core of their national identities—democracy vs communism—yet the two men looked beyond their expected roles in preserving the “relationship” between the two powers on a world stage and took large steps toward peace and cooperation for the sake of their own people and the world. Even though both of these men took much credit for their role, it is important to not diminish the importance of the other and look at the combined efforts that led to this historic accomplishment and the implications that they have on today's challenges.

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