

The failure of Détente and the collapse of Communism 1970-1991



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This resource pack covers GCSE Modern World History B

AQA Exam Board. Topic 6, the failure of Détente and the collapse of Communism 1970-1991.

Why did Détente develop and collapse in the 1970s?

What was Détente?

Détente is a term used to describe the reduction in tension between the Soviet Union and the United States of America that occurred in the late 1960s and lasted for around ten years.

This period of time provided an opportunity for the leaders of both countries to meet and talk. These meetings resulted in agreements that attempted to limit the nuclear arms race and ensured meaningful links were established across the Iron Curtain.

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In taking part in Détente what were the motives of the USSR, USA, China and West Germany?

One motive that applied to all the nations was fear of MAD or 'Mutually Assured Destruction'



Museum task

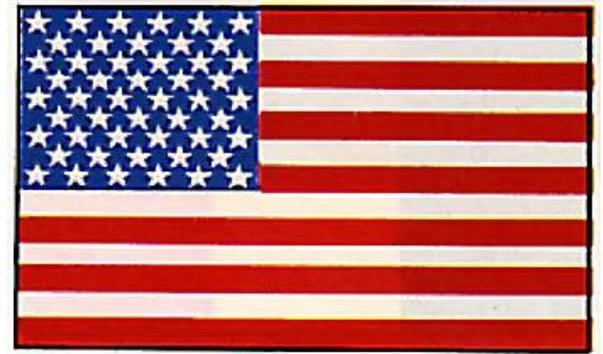
Find the MAD hot spot on the upper level of the National Cold War Exhibition and describe 'Mutually Assured Destruction'.

Top tip – Exam questions of this type are normally worth four marks. Ask yourself what you need to do to get all four marks.

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Why did the USA engage in Détente?

U.S. Presidents Lyndon Johnson and later Richard Nixon had financial reasons for wanting to reduce defence spending as the Vietnam War had drained the American economy. Johnson also needed to expand the American welfare state. The Americans were keen to create and build a relationship with the Chinese as they felt this was a way of driving apart their two greatest Communist enemies.



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The U.S. and Communist China

The Peoples Republic of China (PRC) was created in 1949. For the next thirty years the PRC was not recognised by the United States who instead, maintained diplomatic relations with the remains of the old Republic of China Government who were in exile on the island of Taiwan.

Any hope of opening diplomatic links between the PRC and the United States ended when the military forces of the two countries fought against each other in the Korean War.

The United States prevented the PRC from taking China's seat in the United Nations Assembly. America placed an embargo (ban) on trade between the United States and the PRC and encouraged her allies not to deal with the PRC.

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Despite the ban on trade between the United States and PRC, a series of meetings did take place between the two Governments starting in 1954 and ending in 1970. One of the outcomes of these meetings was, by the end of the 1960s, the relaxing of trade restrictions by the United States with China and the Government also looked for ways to develop a more open dialogue.

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The first 'crack in the ice' of the Cold War between China and the United States appeared in April 1971 at the world table tennis championships in Japan. Glenn Cowan, a member of the American team, boarded the Chinese team bus. It was a serious offence for a Chinese citizen to speak to a foreigner, but the Chinese player Zhuang Zedong felt that to ignore Cowan went against traditional Chinese hospitality and he offered the American a gift. This led to the intervention of Chairman Mao (the Communist Chinese leader) who invited the United States to compete in a table tennis competition held in Beijing.

Task

The main reason why the USA engaged in Détente was to split the USSR and the PRC. How far do you agree with this assertion?

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Why did the USSR engage in Détente?

The Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev also had financial reasons for wanting to reduce defence spending as Brezhnev felt the economic burden placed on the USSR was unsustainable.



The Soviets were prepared to come to an agreement on arms control as a reduction in arms spending would have economic and social benefits for the Soviet leadership. The other aspects of détente – human rights and trade issues - were of minor consequence to them and only acceptable if they were of benefit to Russia.

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The Sino-Soviet Split

The split between the USSR and the PRC began in the late 1950s and became a major diplomatic conflict between the People's Republic of China (PRC) whose leader was Mao Zedong and the USSR whose leader at that time was Joseph Stalin.

During the 1950s China worked with a large number of Soviet advisers who encouraged the Chinese leaders to follow the Russian model of development with an emphasis on heavy industry funded by taxes and levies from the peasantry, whilst making consumer goods a low priority.

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When Stalin died in 1953, Mao felt he was now the senior leader and resented the new Soviet leaders. Malenkov and Khrushchev did not recognise this. In 1959, Khrushchev held a summit meeting with U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower. The Soviets were alarmed by developments within China and sought to appease the West. They also refused to keep to their earlier commitment to help China develop nuclear weapons and support Mao in his border dispute with India.

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The Soviet leaders were well aware that the Americans could match their nuclear power and so sought to engage the United States in talks and negotiations that would avoid the outbreak of war. Equally the USSR were determined not to give Mao and China (PRC) nuclear weapons. During 1962 the final split between the Soviet Union and China came when Mao criticised Khrushchev for backing down in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Khrushchev responded by stating that Mao's policies would lead to nuclear war.

Task

The main reason why the USSR engaged in Détente was its concerns over its relationship with the PRC. How far do you agree with this assertion?

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In July 1971 Henry Kissinger (Security adviser to Richard Nixon) made a secret visit to Beijing to make the arrangements for a visit by President Nixon in the following year. The Soviets retaliated by organising their own summit with Nixon. This paved the way to creating a triangular relationship between Washington, Beijing and Moscow and so ended the worst period of confrontation between the USSR and China.

Task

The main reason why the PRC engaged in Détente was that Chairman Mao felt he should be acknowledged as the senior leader of the Communist World. How far do you agree with this assertion?

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West Germany and the Cold War

1949 saw the creation of two Germany's. In May 1949, the U.S., British and French zones became the ***Bundesrepublik Deutschland*** or in English the **Federal Republic of Germany**. In response the USSR created East Germany, the ***Deutsche Demokratische Republik*** which in English was known as the **DDR** or the **German Democratic Republic**. West Germany was Capitalist and East Germany was a Communist state. As the two Germany's entered the 1950s, hopes of reconciliation and reunification into one nation faded. Germany became a central focus of the Cold War, especially Berlin which remained a divided city with West Berlin isolated deep within Communist East Germany.

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In the early 1970s, one of the first steps towards détente was taken by Willy Brandt – leader of West Germany. He wanted to improve relations with East Germany and Eastern Europe. Discussions between Brandt and the East German leader Willi Stoph began quickly, but no formal agreement was reached as Brandt would not recognise East Germany as an independent and separate country.

Initially Brandt was greeted with suspicion in the East and enthusiasm in the West. In 1970, Brandt signed the Treaty of Moscow with the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and soon afterwards the Treaty of Warsaw with Poland. The latter was an agreement to respect existing frontiers in Central Europe. The policies of Willy Brandt took a more lenient line towards the East than earlier West German leaders and so this helped to ease tensions between the two sides.

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The signing of the Basic Treaty in 1972 gave both East and West Germany the opportunity to 'develop normal good-neighbourly relations with each other on the basis of equal rights'. Further trade, cultural and sporting contacts followed and East Germany made concessions on Berlin. By the time Brandt retired in 1974, the city of Berlin and the two Germany's had achieved some stability.

Task

Who gained the most from Détente?

- The USA
- The USSR
- The PRC
- The two Germany's?

Top tip – you must refer to all four named countries in your answer and you must describe, explain and assess to reach full marks. You should also think about the order in which you make each point as this will help your analysis as you explain who gained most.

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SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty)

What were the SALT talks?

These meetings and negotiations were designed to limit the numbers and size of nuclear weapons held by the major superpowers and their allies. The numbers of weapons held by each side was a major threat not only to world peace but the survival of the planet. These weapons were expensive to build and they had to be carefully maintained, particularly as they got older.

Museum task

Find out about the size, type and number of weapons held by each side.

Describe the effects of nuclear weapons and think about how they were delivered, (missile, bomb, aeroplane or submarine). Were all nuclear weapons the same or were some a greater threat or more dangerous than others?

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A series of meetings began in November 1969 and continued until May 1972 when agreement was reached between Richard Nixon (USA) and Leonid Brezhnev (Soviet Union) on the limitation of strategic ballistic missiles. One of the key stumbling blocks to agreement was how arms should be limited and which types of weapons should be included in the arrangements.

Nixon's visit to China in February 1972 seemed to exert pressure on the Soviet Union to reach an agreement and sign the treaty.

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The SALT I treaty outlined agreement in three areas:

a) The ABM Treaty - (Anti Ballistic Missile Defences). These missiles were designed to intercept and destroy the enemy missiles as they flew towards you.

Each side was only allowed to have 100 ABMs on the two sites, one for their capital city and one to protect their nuclear missiles.

b) The Interim Treaty - Limits were placed on the number of ICBMs (Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles) that each side could have to 1618 for the USSR and 1054 for the USA. Each side was allowed to have 740 SLBM (Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles). The Soviet Union was allowed more ICBM's as America had greater capacity and strength in other areas e.g. strategic bombers.

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However this treaty did not cover developments such as MIRVs (Multiple Independently target able Re-entry Vehicles) which were capable of carrying a collection of nuclear weapons on a single missile. Russian MIRV and the American Cruise Missile continued to be built as the SALT 1 talks were finalised.



Museum task

The National Cold War Exhibition has a MIRV on the lower level, describe the weapon and explain why weapons like this were so important.

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c) The Basic Principles Agreement. This laid down some important rules for the conduct of nuclear warfare. The USA and the USSR pledged 'to do their utmost to avoid military confrontation' and 'to exercise restraint' in international relations. The SALT I agreement was to last for five years therefore SALT II talks began in November 1972.

SALT II

As SALT I had only been a starting point, the intention was to negotiate further. However SALT II ran into difficulties. An outline agreement set equal limits for missile launchers and strategic bombs but left out Cruise missiles. The American Senate, in particular the right wing Senators, saw all arms control as a mechanism for allowing the USSR 'to catch up with America' and so the agreement stalled.

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In 1977, Jimmy Carter, the newly elected American President, attempted to renegotiate the SALT II Treaty in order to reduce the number of Soviet missiles. In June 1979 the SALT II Treaty was signed by Brezhnev and Carter. Despite reassurance from President Carter, the American Senate were growing very uneasy about the Soviet violation of previous agreements and in response refused to ratify (confirm and support) the treaty in 1980.

The SALT talks showed how difficult it was particularly for the U.S. President to negotiate. Whatever agreement was reached between the two leaders it had to be confirmed by the American Senate before it became legal. If the Senate did not confirm and support the agreement then months of negotiations would have been wasted.

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Helsinki Agreement

In 1971, the Communist Warsaw Pact countries proposed a conference with NATO to discuss European Security. The conference began in Helsinki in 1973 with thirty three countries attending. A series of meetings followed and an agreement was reached in 1975. This agreement covered three 'baskets' –

Basket One

This contained an acceptance that the borders of European countries were 'inviolable'; they could not be altered by force.

Basket Two

This promoted links and exchanges across the Iron Curtain in areas of trade and technology.

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Basket Three

This included an agreement to respect human rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of movement across Europe. The West saw the acceptance of these issues by the Communist states of Eastern Europe as a significant step forward. In reality, the Soviet Bloc Governments' ignored or paid lip service to the human rights agreement.

SDI: Strategic Defence Initiative - was commonly called Star Wars after the popular films of the time. This initiative was proposed by the American President Ronald Reagan in 1983. The aim was to use ground based and space missiles to protect the United States from attack by strategic nuclear missiles. The focus was strategic defence rather than the previous strategy of Mutually Assured Destruction which prevented war because both sides would be destroyed.

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Reagan's aim was to create a curtain in space of x-ray lasers to shoot down USSR nuclear missiles. This curtain would be able to deflect and so destroy any nuclear missile attack from the Soviet Union on America. The initiative was never fully developed or deployed but the research and technological development that took place has influenced some of the missile systems in use today. President Reagan carried out a very clever policy by offering SDI research and knowledge (Star Wars) to the USSR knowing that they would struggle financially. In the end what brought the Cold War to an end was money. The Soviet Union could not compete economically with the USA and as money ran out, the whole Communist system in the USSR and in their allied countries (including the DDR or East Germany) collapsed by the end of 1990.

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“General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.”

US President Ronald Reagan at the Berlin Wall (June 12th 1987)



Museum task

Find the ‘Russian dolls’ display on the lower level of the National Cold War Exhibition. Describe and explain the roles played by each leader. Which leader contributed most to Détente? Which leader was most responsible for the collapse of the old Soviet Union in 1990 and why?

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Summary task

Which of the following was more important in preventing nuclear war:

- The negotiations between nations known as Détente
- The SALT talks?
- You must refer to both when explaining your answer.