**ENDING THE COLD WAR**

**HISTORY TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS**

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**This collection of history textbooks comes from a few different nations and looks at what they believe were some of the causes for bringing the Cold War to an end. For the student’s assignment, ask them to focus in on what each textbook, from the different countries, argued was the key person in ending this global conflict.**

**Teachers might want to ask student to create a graphic organizer, where they can put their answers. On the left-hand side, they should write; England, South Africa, Germany and Current U.S. History Textbook. Across the top, they should put the following leaders names; Gorbachev, Thatcher and Reagan.**

**Once they have read through the foreign textbooks, (and their own U.S. History textbook) and filled in the graphic organizer, ask students to explain why each country may have a different perspective on this event. Students could discuss how a nation’s geography, political system, economics and history impact how one sees history.**

**\*Take from the workbook series, *History vs. History: Understanding Historical Thinking and Historiography,* by Dr. Kyle Ward**

**THATCHER’S ROLE IN ENDING THE COLD WAR**

**BRITAIN**

*The debate in the U.S. about how the Cold War ended usually swirls around the legacy of President Ronald Reagan and whether or not he was solely responsible for ending the Cold War. Rarely does Prime Minister Thatcher seem to appear in any of these arguments as even a bit player. But in this British textbook, students read about the “Ronnie and Maggie show.”*

There was a strong bond between Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, both personal and ideological. Both were from the generation whose lives had been shaped by the Second War War. Mrs. Thatcher was particularly influenced by her wartime memories. Her special hero was Winston Churchill. Her view of twentieth century history revolved around the idea that American armies had twice ridden to the rescue after ‘those Europeans’ had made a mess of things.

Through the 1980s, on issues like the Falklands War, deploying Cruise missiles and being tough with the USSR, the Thatcher-Reagan link was a powerful factor in how the West won the Cold War. The Thatcher-Reagan bond (the ‘Ronnie and Maggie show’) lasted long after they were out of politics. At Ronald Reagan’s funeral in 2004, Lady Thatcher’s eulogy was played on videotape: ‘*We have lost a great president, a great American and a great man. And I have lost a dear friend. We here still move in twilight. But we have one beacon to guide us that Ronald Reagan never had—his example.’*

The New Cold War was marked by tough rhetoric and many confrontations. In 1983, there was a major war scare over NATO military exercises in the North Atlantic. Then Soviet jets shot down a Korean passenger airliner, KAL 007, when it strayed off course into Soviet airspace; everyone on board was killed. Cruise missiles were stationed in Europe. The Reagan administration stepped up plans for its ‘Star Wars’ anti-missile shield. All this caused serious tensions between the Soviet Bloc and the West. It has been suggested that the outcome of the Cold War was ultimately decided by this Western firmness, especially by the high levels of defence spending that the USSR simply could not match. In so, Margaret Thatcher must be credited with an important contribution.

Another view is that it was not military pressure from the West that ended the Cold War but Mikhail Gorbachev. Margaret Thatcher can claim some of the credit for this, too. Gorbachev established his authority between 1985-1987. He was thirty years younger than the elderly relics who had led the USSR until 1985. He was a realist who knew things could not go on as they were. His favourite saying as he promoted reform of the USSR was: ‘*If not us, how? If not now, when?’*

Gorbachev made a remarkable impression on the hard-line conservatives Thatcher and Reagan. Mrs. Thatcher met Gorbachev for the first time in 1984 and declared herself to be impressed.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**GORBACHEV’S ROLE IN ENDING THE COLD WAR**

**SOUTH AFRICA**

*It is interesting that the former British colony has a somewhat different perspective on who the main player was in terms of ending the Cold War.*

**What caused the end of communism and the Cold War?**

After the start of the Cold War in 1945, there were over 40 years of tension between the communist Soviet Union and the capitalist West. Both sides spent huge amounts of money on weapons. The threat of a nuclear war hung over the whole world. But suddenly, in 1989, the communist governments in eastern Europe collapsed, and the Cold War came to an end. What caused these dramatic changes?

**How did the changes start?**

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union. At that time, the Soviet Union had many problems. Gorbachev realized that change was necessary.

**What changes did Gorbachev make?**

Gorbachev supported communism but thought that it should be reformed. He introduced two new policies:

* *Perestroika* meaning ‘restructuring’. The aim was to rebuild the Soviet economy which was facing many problems.
* *Glasnost* meaning ‘openness’. This meant that people would be allowed to speak freely and criticize the government.

By *perestroika* Gorbachev meant reforming the communist system, not replacing it with capitalism. But these two policies led to the collapse of communism in eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War.

1989 was a year of dramatic events in eastern Europe. There were revolutions in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Bulgaria and Romania. One after the other, the communist governments collapsed and elections for new democratic governments were held.

**How did these changes affect the Cold War?**

Gorbachev’s new policies had an immediate effect on the Cold War. He held a number of meetings with the American president, Ronald Reagan. As a result, the tensions of the Cold War began to ease. Both leaders agreed to reduce the number of weapons. At the end of 1989 they agreed that the Cold War was over.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**THE END OF THE COLD WAR**

**GERMANY**

*German students also seem to learn that while Reagan was an “uncompromising anti-communist,” Gorbachev was the one who wanted reform and called for change.*

**The End of the Cold War**

In the beginning of the 80's the relationship between the USSR and the USA stood at a low point. The invasion of Afghanistan had isolated the USSR internationally. In the USA, the hardliners saw themselves vindicated. US President Ronald Reagan, an uncompromising anti-communist, spoke publicly of the USSR as the "Evil Empire". The room to maneuver for the USSR became increasingly smaller. In addition to the internal political consequences generated from the Afghan War came grave economic problems in the socialist camp and a creeping erosion of the up till now unchallenged Brezhnev Doctrine, which prohibited any deviation from the course of the leading power. It was most of all the increasingly self confidently acting union and citizens' rights movements in Poland, which challenged the authorities of the USSR in the socialist camp.

In this phase of the newly sharpened Cold War, the American arms spending grew astronomically high. In addition, President Reagan began with the development of a space based missile defense system (SDI). With that a new round of the arms race seemed inevitable, but it did not come to that. What had happened? In 1985 a new man reached the top of the USSR – Mikhail S Gorbachev.

Gorbachev initiated fundamental reforms, in order to overcome the multiple crises of the Soviet social system. This caused a radical break with the traditional military politics of the USSR, which to date was oriented strictly towards military superiority. Western politicians were also prompted to consider a new security policy.[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. Rowe, Chris (ed.). *The Making of Modern Britain, 1951-2007.* Nelson Thornes, 2009, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bottaro, Jean, et. Al. *In Search of Social Sciences: Grade 9 Learner’s Book.* Oxford, 2007, 168-170. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Osburg, Florian (Ed). *Expedition Geschichte, Berlin Klasse 10.* Bildungshaus Schulbuchverlage, 2008, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)