



## End of the Cold War

The death of Leonid Brezhnev led to a fundamental shift in Soviet policies. A long period of political and economic stagnation ended abruptly, leading to fundamental changes in Soviet policies towards its client states, and the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) within its own state. By 1991, the system had collapsed and the USSR was gone.

It is a mistake to view Gorbachev as anything other than a Communist committed to preserving the regime. In some respects he faced a situation similar to that of Lenin: to preserve the communist regime, he needed to make some changes that seemed to reverse the course of socialism. Thus, the policies of perestroika and glasnost should be compared to Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP); Lenin's call for "one step backwards, two steps forwards" is just as apt for Gorbachev's economic reforms.

Gorbachev had to deal with significant economic and social problems. In particular, the citizens of non-Russian Soviet Satellite states made an increasingly volatile issue out of their nationalist claims. As the Warsaw Pact countries were winning autonomy, they began to agitate for recognition. The Baltic countries, with connections and borders with the West, were demanding first autonomy and then independence. Unlike the other SSRs, these countries had been incorporated into the USSR through agreements made with Nazi Germany. Although their integration into the USSR was not challenged by the West, neither were they ever recognized as members. Thus, their political agitations for independence were supported not just by anti-communists but also by those who were reacting against a Nazi action that had been accepted by the international community.

In foreign policy, initially Gorbachev's route did not deviate much from that of his predecessors. In 1985 he renewed the Warsaw Pact and he supported leftist revolutions, particularly that of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Unlike Brezhnev, however, he sought an end to the costly war in Afghanistan, and began to announce troop reductions, negotiating an agreement with the Afghans in 1988 that led to Soviet withdrawal by 1989.

That same year, 1989, also proved to be the decisive year for Eastern Europe. By January 1990, only the isolationist Albania remained communist. Gorbachev's statement that its allies should be able to pursue socialism in ways compatible with their histories and cultures had led to the collapse of communism. In June 1990, the Warsaw Pact countries agreed to its dissolution, signalling to a large extent the end of the Cold War.

The United States is often seen as the victor in the Cold War and one issue under discussion is how much US foreign policy, and particularly the policies of presidents Reagan and Bush, is responsible

for the end of the Cold War. Reagan took a very strong stance that often reflected his background as an actor. In 1983 he referred to the Soviet Union as the “Evil Empire” and his SDI program was nicknamed “Star Wars”. While such pop-culture references may seem comical today, they were very potent in engaging an American public that had been stung by Vietnam and that viewed any form of aggressive US foreign policy with trepidation. The nuclear threat was further heightened by the much publicized accidents at Three Mile Island in the United States and Chernobyl in the Soviet Union. The Cold War’s influence in American culture was once again renewed, as was fear of a nuclear threat.

The Cold War ended quickly and abruptly, but the end was the result of long-term causes. The weaknesses of the Soviet dominion had been clear as early as 1948, when Czechoslovakia tried to remain outside the Eastern bloc and failed, and when Yugoslavia was expelled and then had economic success beyond that of other communist countries due, to a large extent, to the receipt of American aid. Uprisings in East Germany, Poland and Hungary in the 1950s showed the tensions within the Warsaw Pact, as did the Prague Spring of 1968. Rather than a show of strength, the **Brezhnev Doctrine** in some respects was an articulation of Soviet weakness, as force was required to prevent countries from leaving their sphere.

The Cold War did not end communism, nor did it end ideological conflicts. However, it signalled the end of the bipolar world that had existed since 1945 and left a power vacuum. It has seen the Balkanization of Central and Eastern Europe and an increase in sectarian violence. This is not to say that the Cold War was a desired state of affairs, but it was a conflict between two rational actors that had parity of power and were guided by ideological differences. The world today is not so simple.

### Discussion point:

#### Are there winners and losers in the Cold War?

Consider the aftermath of the Cold War, also in terms of subsequent conflicts and the long-term economic and human costs for both the Western world and the Eastern bloc, and their allies.

**Brezhnev Doctrine** The policy whereby the Soviet Union asserted its right to intervene in the domestic politics of any communist country to perpetuate its status as socialist. It was developed in light of the Prague Spring of 1968 and subsequently used to justify Soviet intervention in communist countries.

**Activity:****Leadership timeline**

When studying the Cold War, one of the main problems is remembering who is in power when, and where. It is a good idea to establish a table of the relevant countries and personalities involved so that at any given point in time, you know who was in power.

Here is a table for you to copy and complete.

	Stalin			
	Stalin (to 1953) Khrushchev			
	Khrushchev			
	Khrushchev (to 1964) Brezhnev			
	Brezhnev			
	Brezhnev			
	Brezhnev (to 1982) Andropov (1982–4) Chernenko (1984–5)			
	Gorbachev			

**Social, cultural and economic impact of the Cold War**

The Cold War was being fought in proxy wars and in the realm of popular culture. The nature of the struggle permeated all aspects of society, but perhaps the most lasting effect was the fear of nuclear war as expressed in the media during the course of the Cold War. Books, film and music all addressed the issue in speculative ways, asking the ultimate "what if" question. Additionally, areas as diverse as language and sport were affected. The end of the Cold War can be seen as a triumph of one political system over the other, but it can also be seen as a cultural shift.

The social, cultural and economic effects of the Cold War are inextricably linked to the politics of the era. In the 20th century, popular culture was far more widespread than in previous eras, when cultural trends had tended to be limited to a particular class or geographical region. Through the new technology that had been adopted in the arts and media—radio, television, film—everyone could have access to cultural developments, regardless of where they came from; language and distance were not deterrents to its spread.

This meant, to a large extent, a homogenization of society. While a certain amount of this had previously been seen as desirable (in 19th-century Germany and Italy, for example, one official

language may have pre-empted dialects but it helped standardize official documents and education), there was now some questioning of this homogenization, as artists in particular feared the loss of local identity and the idea of cultural imperialism echoed the tsarist policies of **Russification**. This position was especially strong in the Baltic countries, which had escaped Soviet domination until the Second World War. Once again, the use of local language could be seen as an act of rebellion against a monolithic empire—even one that purported to represent the interests of all within its borders.

The Soviets had been successful in removing religion from the mainstream but they had by no means eliminated it. In the European and Caucasian parts of the Soviet Union, the Orthodox Church continued to exist, even if repression took place and the numbers of people (mostly old women and young children) attending religious services declined. In central Asia, Islam maintained a foothold and was a potential source for counter-revolution; the concern over Afghanistan and the determination of the Soviet state to intervene and prevent the establishment of an Islamist regime there was in part predicated by a fear of the rise of radical Islam within the USSR, especially on the heels of the Iranian revolution.

Cultural homogenization was also seen in the Western world, and American culture was increasingly seen more generally as Western culture. This was both embraced and resented by other Western states. Regardless of the language of a population, English was quickly becoming the common tongue—the one that students were most likely to learn after their own. In the face of US political dominance, it was perceived as the most logical and useful language to learn. But there were also those who were determined to reverse this trend. In France, the strongest reaction occurred—the Académie Française established rigorous rules to prevent English from encroaching on the French language.

There were other movements against this linguistic imperialism. Created in the 1890s, the invented Esperanto language saw a resurgence. In smaller states that were being eclipsed by larger language groups, learning Esperanto was seen as a way to embrace internationalism that did not represent cultural imperialism. However, this was a quixotic (idealistic) endeavor and most pragmatists chose to learn English or Russian.

The United States, which was created on foundations of religious freedom and tolerance, saw a backlash in the 1960s at the same time that the civil rights movement was in full force. Although religious freedom was a core tenet of the US constitution, the country was still overwhelmingly Protestant and suspicious of those who were not. When the Catholic John Kennedy was elected president in 1960, he had to impress upon Americans that he would not be

**Russification** A policy dating back to tsarist Russia whereby all national minorities were suppressed and the primacy of Russian language, culture and religion was put forth as the only recognized forms of expression. In an attempt to create a universal communist system, the Communist Party pursued similar policies of repression, adopting the Russian language as a standard and marginalizing the languages and cultures of the other SSRs.



Esperanto poster against international fascism, 1936–9.

following the will of the pope or consulting with him in his decision-making process. Although he was heralded as an American hero later in his career, he won the election with the narrowest margin in history to date, and this was partly due to his Catholicism.

The Cold War ushered in the television era and its effect on the general knowledge of the population and the policies made by governments was particularly strong in the West. While those under authoritarian regimes had limited avenues for obtaining information, the Western world saw a significant reduction in censorship. The Cold War represented the golden age of autonomy for journalists in particular and the media more broadly. It was in this era that the dogged determination of two journalists was able to bring about the resignation of a US president (Nixon) through the Watergate scandal (see chapter 5, pages 296–7).

In previous decades, culture had been used by governing bodies to perpetuate their point of view and this did not abate with the onset of the Cold War. The Western world used the media for its own propaganda purposes; Radio Free Europe and Voice of America are two examples of how the United States used media to spread its own ideology in the hopes of toppling Soviet regimes. While the USA may have been unwilling to support revolutionaries in an open and direct manner, they would certainly encourage them from the sidelines.

Film and television were the main media for advocating the particular position of the writer, director or producer. The Vietnam War provides many examples of how films were used to influence mainstream America, and how public opinion shifted throughout the course and aftermath of the war. Three films immediately come to mind: *Green Berets*; *The Deer Hunter*; and *Platoon*. Filmed in 1968 with John Wayne as the lead, *Green Berets* was an unapologetic endorsement of the Vietnam War, characterizing the Americans who fought there as heroic, while the North Vietnamese were portrayed as absolute villains. The film was produced and released before the Tet Offensive had been broadcast on American televisions and was bolstered by the support that the US public had for the war at that time. In contrast, *The Deer Hunter*, was released in 1978, after the US disaffection with the Vietnam War. In this film, the director explores not just the war itself but the ruined lives of the men who enlisted. Lastly, *Platoon* (1986) is Oliver Stone's attempt to explore both sides of the American military intervention using two platoon leaders as archetypes: one a grizzled, battle-worn pragmatist and the other an idealist trying to keep his men on the right path. In the latter two films there is a certain amount of moral ambivalence and the war itself is not seen as an indictment of US government actions—but its treatment of the volunteer soldiers certainly is.

The use of films to portray the risks inherent in the Cold War dates back to its onset, as do the movies that exploited the irrational US fear of communism within its own borders. In *On the Beach*, the northern hemisphere has been destroyed by nuclear war and survivors have to come to terms with the fact that the human race is facing extinction. The movies of the era did not necessarily assign blame; as mutual assured destruction became the prevailing theory of

the era, neither side was seen as completely guilty or innocent. Instead the themes tended to focus on the intertwining of technology and warfare—with technology both welcomed and suspect. The ideas put forth in *1984* and *Brave New World* were further developed after viewing the destruction wrought on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As might be expected, Western popular culture was much more self-critical, as writers and film makers in places with free speech could show their own governments as culpable.

These cultural reflections led to an omnipresent sense of disaster on both sides of the Cold War. With the fear of mutual assured destruction, there was always a sense that the other side was not rational and might attempt to win the unwinnable war. In *War Games*, it was a teenage computer geek who put the world on a path of destruction by unknowingly breaking into a US Department of Defense computer that may or may not have the capability to override human decisions; it was only the determination of the military to avoid war that de-escalated the situation. This film was, in effect, a replay of the Cuban Missile Crisis, where one side had to trust the other to bring about the end of the crisis.

At the centre of this was the youth culture of the era that prevailed on both sides of the Cold War. After the Second World War, there was an increase in the birth rate. The “baby boomers”, as they were called, were the children born in the aftermath of the Second World War, and their large numbers meant that culture and consumerism targeted this generation. In the United States, the baby boomers were children of an affluent society that had disposable income and a substantial amount of leisure time. In Europe and the USSR, this generation still felt the effects of the war; for example, it is often forgotten that the British did not have rationing until after the war, and that it continued until 1954.

In the USA, this meant a change in direction, especially in the latest music and film. There were radical shifts as American youth embraced rock ‘n’ roll. This began in the 1950s, but the metamorphosis of music continued well into the 1960s as bands and singers acceptable to parents were increasingly eclipsed by those that symbolized rebellion. In the 1950s, this shift was exemplified by Elvis Presley, who represented an American music movement that incorporated jazz and blues into popular music. In the 1960s, the British provided further deviation as the Who, the Rolling Stones and, most importantly, the Beatles became the most popular bands of the age. All of this music was seen as a rejection of parental, and by extension, societal values. Even within this narrow time frame, there is a strong cultural shift; Presley voluntarily joined the army and showed himself to be a patriotic American; the 1960s bands and musicians protested against the military actions of their governments.

As this generation went to college, their ideas were further supported by liberal university professors. Away from their parents for the first time and experimenting with different ideologies, Western youth began to question and criticize their parents’ unquestioning hatred of communism and socialism, especially as countries such as Sweden were providing positive models of how a socialist system could work.

This gave rise to radical organizations throughout the West, including the Weather Underground in the USA and the Baader-Meinhof group in Germany. Such groups advocated the violent overthrow of their governments in an attempt to establish a more equitable society. They often engaged in political violence, resulting in the deaths of politicians and innocent bystanders. While they represented the radical factions of young society, such groups show that the young in the 1960s were fully in favour of changing the balance of power in their countries away from the establishment (written with a capital "E"). Though their political clout was limited at best, this showed a change in attitudes.

All of these ideas converged and were exemplified in the Woodstock concert of 1969. Perhaps in a foreshadowing nod to the baby boomers, the concert was initially meant to be a profit-making venture in which people would attend a three-day concert with 32 musical groups taking the stage. Approximately 186 000 tickets were sold, but the event quickly became free as the fences to the farm where the concert took place were cut. The event soon took on a life of its own as it represented the rejection of the Establishment: roughly 500 000 people participated in an anti-war, pro-drug, free-love party that in some respects became a mini-nation unto itself for four days. A US film company was there to document the concert and thus Woodstock entered into the US national consciousness as emblematic of the hippie culture of the 1960s and early 1970s.

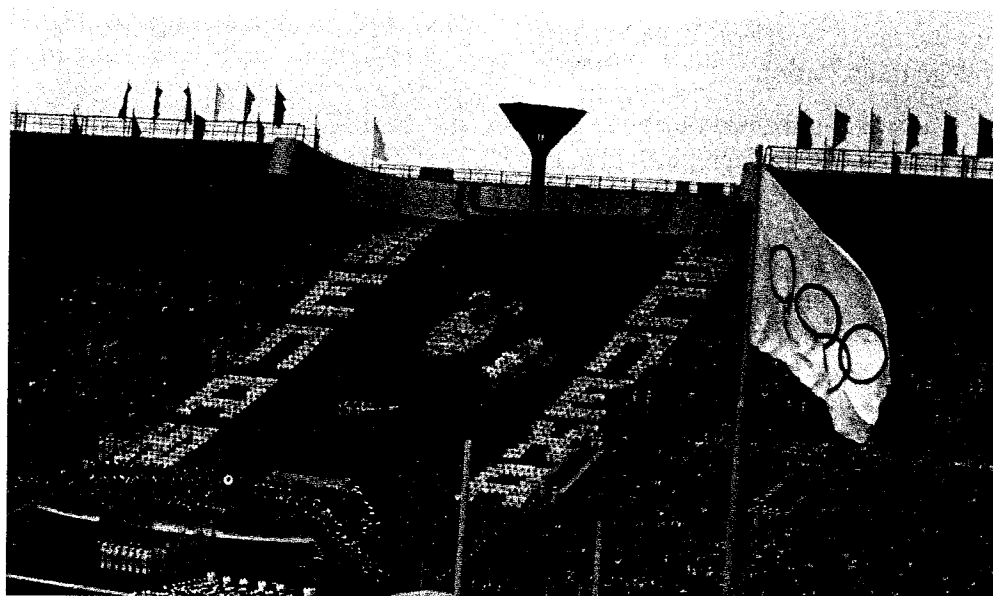
While this reaction against the government is keenly remembered, particularly in the United States, there was also the part of the Cold War that supported conservative American politics. After Johnson chose not to run for re-election, the USA was governed by Nixon and Ford—two Republicans—and then after the presidency of Jimmy Carter, by Reagan and Bush. All but six years in a 24-year period were dominated by a conservative executive and this was reflected in the culture, too. After the innovations of the 1950s and 1960s (and when the baby boomers reached adulthood), the 1970s and 1980s were a time in which culture was once again mainstreamed. The counterculture (seen in movements such as punk, rap, hip hop and grunge) was once again under the radar, seen only in independent movies and heard only on college radio stations.

Another area where the Cold War was fought was on the athletics field. After the Second World War, the Olympics in particular, but all world sporting events, took on mythic proportions as every event was seen as an apologia or indictment of Cold War politics. For most of the Cold War, the communist countries poured immense sums of money into their sports programmes so that they could prove their superiority in the sports arenas, and they were very successful. In communist Eastern Europe, children were targeted as talented and began training in special schools and camps at a very young age. They became master practitioners in their given sports, to which the majority of their time and energy was devoted. This was focused on particular sports in particular countries: East Germany was well-known for its women swimmers (and was accused of using steroids to bring about such successful results); Romania became known as a

centre for gymnastic excellence—Nadia Comăneci and Béla Károlyi became international stars after the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, Canada. The communist countries faced increasing international scrutiny, as such sporting events were supposed to be between amateur players, not professionals.

The most dramatic Cold War events centred on two ice hockey competitions, largely due to this issue of amateur status. The Soviets were seen as recruiting a team of players that may not have been officially professionals but in essence were. On the other hand, in Canada and the USA, which both had professional hockey leagues, international competitions were largely the domain of college students. However, in 1972, the Summit Series was a seven-game competition between Team Canada—the best of their professional hockey players—and the USSR. The series had to be extended to eight games because each team had won three, and one game was a tie. In the eighth game, the Canadians scored a winning goal with 34 seconds remaining, giving the series to the Canadians.

Even more dramatic than this event, perhaps, was the so-called “Miracle on Ice” that occurred in the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York (USA). This game was all the more important because at the time President Carter was considering boycotting the summer 1980 Olympics due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The US team consisted mostly of college students and several graduate amateurs and the Soviets were the dominant team; everyone fully expected the USSR to win the gold medal. The USA made it through to the medal round, where it was expected that they would be eliminated by the Soviets and play either Sweden or Finland for the bronze medal. Instead, in a stunning turn, the US team defeated the Soviets and went on to defeat Finland for the gold medal. This was used in the United States to show the moral superiority of American sportsmanship in a David vs Goliath fight. In the USSR, *Pravda* did not even publish the results of the game and the Soviet silver medal (won after defeating Sweden in their final match) was downplayed.



Misha the bear, mascot of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, in a view from the opening ceremony.



The USA was going through dramatic social and economic changes in the 1970s and 1980s but the situation in the USSR remained stagnant. The planned economy still focused on the production of heavy industry and weapons at the expense of consumer goods. Vast sums of money were spent on what was considered to be traditional culture in the Soviet sphere: classical music, ballet and Olympic sports benefited from the Cold War. Meanwhile, Eastern European popular culture lagged behind the West, and much of the success of Radio Free Europe and Voice of America came from their ability to broadcast Western music. Similarly, the black market was full of Western goods—Levi's jeans were sold at premium prices, and hard currency was purchased at well above the official value.

Western Europe recovered remarkably after the war, and the Marshall Plan must be credited for a large chunk of this recovery. The \$13 billion that went to European countries helped them to build the new infrastructure that made them competitive with other states. In turn, and in time, they too had the disposable income necessary to purchase consumer goods, and engage in trade with the USA and other markets. This created a prosperity in the West that did not exist in the East; it further led to feelings of discontent in Eastern Europe and dissent grew. Unlike the Stalinist era of the early 1950s, the political leadership found it increasingly difficult to suppress dissenters and opposition to the regimes grew. It is not an exaggeration to say that the demise of communist Eastern Europe was due not just to political oppression but also to a sense of economic and social disparity. The average Eastern European wanted the right to cultural self-determination and economic prosperity, and this is what they saw in the West.