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The Cold War Thaws

TERMS & NAMES

- Nikita Khrushchev
- destalinization
- Leonid Brezhnev
- John F. Kennedy
- Lyndon Johnson
- détente
- Richard M. Nixon
- SALT
- Ronald Reagan
- Star Wars

MAIN IDEA

The Cold War began to thaw as the superpowers entered an era of uneasy diplomacy.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The United States and the countries of the former Soviet Union continue to cooperate and maintain a cautious peace.

SETTING THE STAGE In the postwar years, the Soviet Union kept a firm grip on its satellite countries in Eastern Europe. These countries were Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Albania, and East Germany. It did not allow them to direct and develop their own economies. Instead, it insisted that they develop industries to meet Soviet needs. These policies greatly hampered Eastern Europe's economic recovery.

The Soviets Dominate Eastern Europe

After Stalin died, a new, more moderate group of Soviet leaders came to power. These new leaders allowed their satellite countries a taste of independence, as long as they remained firmly Communist and allied with the Soviet Union. During the 1950s and 1960s, however, growing protest movements in Eastern Europe threatened the Soviet Union's grip over the region. Increasing tensions with Communist China also diverted Soviet attention and forces.

Destalinization and Rumbblings of Protest Joseph Stalin died on March 5, 1953. Shortly after his death, a loyal member of the Communist party named **Nikita Khrushchev** became the dominant Soviet leader. The shrewd, tough Khrushchev publicly denounced Stalin for jailing and killing loyal Soviet citizens. His speech signaled the beginning of a policy called **destalinization**, or purging the country of Stalin's memory. Workers destroyed monuments of the former dictator and reburied his body outside the Kremlin wall. Khrushchev also called for "peaceful competition" with the capitalist states.

This new Soviet outlook did not change life in the satellite countries, however. Their resentment occasionally turned into active protest. In October 1956, for example, the Hungarian army joined with protesters to overthrow Hungary's Soviet-controlled government. Storming through the capital, Budapest, angry mobs waved Hungarian flags with the Communist hammer-and-sickle emblem cut out. "From the youngest child to the oldest man," one protester declared, "no one wants communism."

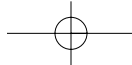
A popular and liberal Hungarian Communist leader named Imre Nagy (IHM-ray nahj) formed a new government. Nagy promised free elections and demanded that Soviet troops leave Hungary. In response, in early November, Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest. They were backed by infantry units. Thousands of Hungarian freedom fighters armed themselves with pistols and bottles. The Soviets overpowered them, however. The invaders replaced the Hungarian government with pro-Soviet leaders and eventually executed Nagy.

A toppled statue of Stalin lies in Moscow, a stark symbol of Khrushchev's policy of destalinization.



THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Recognizing Effects What effects did destalinization have on Soviet satellite countries?



HISTORYMAKERS

The Victim



Imre Nagy (1896–1958)

Of peasant background, Imre Nagy was captured by the Soviets during World War I and recruited into their army. He became a Communist and lived in Moscow until 1944, when he returned to Soviet-occupied Hungary.

Although he held several posts in his country's Communist government, his loyalty remained with the peasants. Because of his independent approach, he fell in and out of favor with the Soviet regime. He led the anti-Soviet revolt in October 1956.

The Soviets forcefully put down the uprising and deported Nagy. They then brought him back to Hungary, where they tried and executed him. He remained in disgrace until the Hungarian Supreme Court cleared his name in 1989.

Faces of Protest



Soviet tanks move into Prague in 1968 to stamp out Czech reforms.

The Survivor



Alexander Dubček (1921–1992)

Alexander Dubček was the son of a member of the Czech Communist Party and moved rapidly up through the Communist ranks in Czechoslovakia.

In response to the spirit of change in the 1960s, Dubček instituted broad reforms in the 1968 Prague Spring. Not surprisingly, Soviet officials reacted negatively. Tanks rolled into Prague to suppress a feared revolt.

The Soviets expelled Dubček from the Communist Party in 1970. He survived, though. He regained political prominence in 1989, when the Communists agreed to share power in a coalition government. When the new nation of Slovakia was formed in 1992, Dubček became head of its Social Democratic Party.

Background

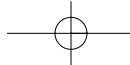
Nikita Khrushchev was the first Soviet leader to leave office alive.

Brezhnev and the Revolt in Czechoslovakia Despite this show of force in Hungary, Khrushchev lost prestige in his country as a result of the Cuban missile crisis. In 1964, Communist party leaders voted to remove him from power. His replacement, **Leonid Brezhnev**, quickly adopted repressive domestic policies. The Communist party strictly enforced laws to limit such basic human rights as freedom of speech and worship. Government censors carefully controlled what writers could publish. And Brezhnev clamped down on those who dared to protest his government's policies. For example, the secret police arrested many dissidents, including Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, winner of the 1970 Nobel Prize for literature. They then expelled him from the Soviet Union.

Brezhnev made it clear that he would not tolerate dissent in Eastern Europe either. His policy was put to the test in early 1968. At that time, Czech Communist leader Alexander Dubček (DOOB-chehk) loosened controls on censorship to offer his country socialism with "a human face." This period of reform, when Czechoslovakia's capital bloomed with new ideas, became known as Prague Spring.

Prague Spring, however, did not survive the summer. On August 20, armed forces from the Warsaw Pact nations invaded Czechoslovakia. Brezhnev justified this invasion by claiming the Soviet right to prevent its satellites from rejecting communism.

Split with China While many of the Soviet satellite countries resisted Communist rule, China seemed firmly committed to communism. In fact, to cement the ties between their Communist powers, Mao and Stalin had signed a 30-year treaty of friendship in 1950. Their spirit of cooperation, however, ran out before the treaty did.



The Soviets assumed that the Chinese would follow Soviet leadership in world affairs. As the Chinese grew more confident, however, they came to resent being Moscow's junior partner. They began to spread their own brand of communism in Africa and other parts of Asia. In 1959, Khrushchev punished the Chinese for their independence by refusing to share nuclear secrets with them. The following year, the Soviets ended technical economic aid to China. This split eventually grew so wide that fighting broke out along the long Chinese-Soviet border. After repeated incidents, the two neighbors today maintain a fragile peace.

From Brinkmanship to Détente

In the 1970s, the United States and the Soviet Union finally backed away from the aggressive policies of brinkmanship they had followed during the early postwar years. The superpowers slowly moved toward a period of lowered tensions.

Brinkmanship Breaks Down The brinkmanship policy that the United States followed during the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations resulted in one terrifying crisis after another. Though these crises erupted all over the world, they were united by a common fear. Nuclear war seemed possible.

In 1960, the U-2 incident prevented a meeting between the United States and the Soviet Union to discuss the buildup of arms on both sides. Then, during the presidency of **John F. Kennedy** in the early 1960s, the Cuban missile crisis made the superpowers' use of nuclear weapons a very real possibility. (See pages 872–873.) The crisis ended when the Soviet ships turned back to avoid a confrontation at sea. “We’re eyeball to eyeball,” the relieved U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk said, “and I think the other fellow just blinked.” President Kennedy’s Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, however, admitted just how close the world had come to disaster:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

In the face of an air attack [on Cuba] and in the face of the probability of a ground attack, it was certainly possible, and I would say probable, that a Cuban sergeant or Soviet officer in a missile silo, without authority from Moscow, would have launched one or more of those intermediate-range missiles, equipped with a nuclear warhead, against one or more of the cities on the East Coast of the United States.

ROBERT McNAMARA, quoted in *Inside the Cold War*

Tensions remained high, and after the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, **Lyndon Johnson** assumed the U.S. presidency. Committed to stopping the spread of communism, President Johnson escalated U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam.

The United States Embraces Détente Widespread popular protests wracked the United States during the Vietnam War. And the turmoil did not end with U.S. withdrawal. As it tried to heal its internal wounds, the United States began backing away

from its policy of direct confrontation with the Soviet Union. **Détente**, a policy of lessened Cold War tensions, finally replaced brinkmanship during the administration of President **Richard M. Nixon**.

President Nixon’s move toward détente grew out of a philosophy known as realpolitik. This term comes from the German word meaning “realistic politics.” In practice, realpolitik meant dealing with other nations in a practical and flexible manner. While the United States continued to contain the spread of communism, the two superpowers agreed to pursue détente and to reduce tensions.

Nixon’s new policy represented a dramatic personal reversal as well as a political shift for the

Vocabulary

détente: a French word meaning “a loosening”

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Recognizing

Bias Do you think that Robert McNamara’s view of the Soviet threat in Cuba was justified or was due to a biased U.S. fear of the Soviet Union? Explain.

In a spirit of cooperation and détente, the U.S. and the Soviet Union try to prevent their conflicts from destroying the world.



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**THINK THROUGH HISTORY****C. Analyzing**

Causes Why did the United States begin pursuing a policy of détente?

country. His rise in politics in the 1950s was largely due to his strong anti-Communist position. Twenty years later, he became the first American president after World War II to visit Communist China. The visit made sense in a world in which three—rather than just two—superpowers eyed each other suspiciously. “We want the Chinese with us when we sit down and negotiate with the Russians,” Nixon explained.

Nixon Visits the Communist Superpowers Three months after visiting Beijing in February 1972, President Nixon made history again by becoming the first American president since the beginning of the Cold War to visit the Soviet Union. After a series of meetings called the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (**SALT**), Nixon and Brezhnev signed the SALT I Treaty. This five-year agreement limited to 1972 levels the number of intercontinental ballistic and submarine-launched missiles each country could have. In 1975, 33 nations joined the United States and the Soviet Union in signing a commitment to détente and cooperation, the Helsinki Accords.

Détente Cools

Under Presidents Nixon and Gerald Ford, the United States gradually improved relations with China and the Soviet Union. In the late 1970s, however, President Jimmy Carter’s concern over harsh treatment of Soviet protesters threatened to prevent a second round of SALT negotiations. In June 1979, Carter and Brezhnev finally signed the SALT II agreement. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December of that year, however, the U.S. Congress refused to ratify SALT II. Tensions continued to mount as increasing numbers of European and Asian countries began building nuclear arsenals.



U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev optimistically mark the signing of the SALT II treaty in Vienna, Austria, in 1979. Carter, however, remained concerned over Soviet violations of its citizens’ human rights.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY**D. Contrasting**

In what ways did Presidents Nixon’s and Reagan’s policies toward the Soviet Union differ?

Ronald Reagan Abandons Détente The fiercely anti-Communist U.S. president **Ronald Reagan** took office in 1981. He continued his country’s retreat from détente. In 1983, he announced a program—the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—to protect America against enemy missiles. The program, called **Star Wars** after a popular movie, was never put into effect. It remained a symbol of U.S. anti-Communist sentiment, however.

Tensions increased as U.S. activities such as arming Nicaragua’s Contras pushed the two countries even farther from détente. A transfer of power in the Soviet Union in 1985, however, brought a new policy toward the United States and the beginnings of a final thaw in the Cold War.

The Cold War between the two superpowers ebbed and flowed. Meanwhile, as you will learn in the next chapter, developing countries continued their own struggles for independence from colonialism.

Section 5 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Nikita Khrushchev
- destalinization
- Leonid Brezhnev
- John F. Kennedy
- Lyndon Johnson
- détente
- Richard M. Nixon
- SALT
- Ronald Reagan
- Star Wars

2. TAKING NOTES

In a chart like the one below, indicate each U.S. president’s contribution to Cold War tensions by writing his name in the correct column.

Tensions Increased	Tensions Decreased
Eisenhower	

Write a paragraph summarizing the policies and actions of one of these presidents.

3. EVALUATING DECISIONS

Do you think it was a wise political move for Nixon to visit Communist China and the Soviet Union? Why or why not?

THINK ABOUT

- the Cuban missile crisis
- realpolitik
- public sentiment after the Vietnam War

4. THEME ACTIVITY

Revolution Write a poem or song lyrics expressing a Hungarian or Czech citizen’s protest against Communist rule.