

What were the significant developments in US foreign policy, 1973-1989? HL 2007

The Vietnam War was a turning point in post-WW2 US foreign policy. The failure of the TET offensive and the realisation that America wasn't winning the war, allied with the huge cost and general unpopularity of the war, resulted in Lyndon Johnson not running for re-election. Nixon, on becoming President, promised a policy of Vietnamisation- a withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, while continuing to assist the South Vietnamese financially and politically. This signalled an overall policy shift in foreign relations. Nixon sought to set up diplomatic relations with China and to further maintain improved political ties with the Soviet Union. (background info- max 12) (7)

By 1972, Only 63,000 US troops remained in Vietnam. Negotiations between the US and N Vietnam culminated in the Paris Peace Accords in 1973. Nixon called it 'peace with honour' but 40% of S Vietnam was lost to the North. In 1975 Vietnam was unified as one country after the fall of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City). This was a defeat for Containment. Not only had Vietnam become Communist but so had Laos and Cambodia. Direct military intervention had now been abandoned in favour of the Nixon Doctrine, which professed to help countries under internal attack but not send in US troops. (6)

The policy of Détente was a marked departure from nearly three decades of direct military intervention in Cold war arenas. China had become a communist country in 1949 and since then America had failed to recognise its legitimacy by cutting off diplomatic links and succeeded in blocking its entry into the UN until 1971. However, Nixon hoped for improved relations for a number of factors. He wanted to improve US-Chinese trade links, put pressure on North Vietnam in the Peace negotiations and to play off China and The USSR against each other. This seemed to work, as after having visiting China in 1972 (covertly; supervised by Kissinger), Nixon was invited to meet Brezhnev (who feared political isolation) in Moscow for a summit meeting. This proved to be highly successful as SALT 1 (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty) was signed by both leaders. This limited the number of ICBMs that could be produced by both countries. This meeting was a victory for Detente as it recognised the dangers posed by the arms race. **It was also a significant diplomatic victory for Nixon who went on to secure a second term as president in 1972 as a result.** (9)

While the policy of Détente was severely tested in the Arab-Israeli conflict and the CIA-backed overthrow and assassination of Chilean president Allende, Détente was continued by Nixon's successor Gerald Ford. The Helsinki Final Act was signed in 1975. This guaranteed that that Europe's borders would remain unchanged as well as encouraging trade and cultural links between the Communist bloc and the West. Agreement was also reached on future European security and the protection of human rights. Additionally, The Apollo-Soyuz project was an agreement to co-operate in terms of Space travel : it was the first joint flight of the US and Soviet space programs and it effectively marked the end of the Space Race which had begun in 1957. **This was a hugely significant development and reflected a new spirit of co-operation between the two superpowers.** (8)

Carter's foreign policy differed somewhat from that of his predecessors. He wanted a policy based on moral principles. A decision to further limit arms production was agreed on in 1979 with SALT II. His presidency however would end in the return to Cold War tensions. His criticism of Soviet treatment of dissidents put a strain on relations. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 brought Détente to an end. **This was significant as it would mark a new era of mistrust and heightened cold war tension.** As a result, trade restrictions on exports to USSR were imposed and ratification on Salt

It was suspended. The US boycotted also boycotted the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. This, along with a reverse boycott by the USSR of the L.A games in 1984, was symbolic of renewed hostility. (8)

The Cold War continued to intensify in the 1980s under President Ronald Reagan. Reagan saw the Cold War as a moral conflict between the forces of good and evil, e.g he referred to the USSR as an 'evil empire'. He viewed Moscow with distrust and was strongly opposed to the policy of Detente in his first term of office and the US defence budget increased by over 50% over 5 years. Reagan also pursued a policy of containment in Central America and Afghanistan: Aid was given to Nicaragua and El Salvador to help crush left-wing revolutions and they supported Afghan guerrillas in their war against the Soviets. (7)

Other significant developments included in US foreign policy in the 1980s included placing economic sanctions on countries which were suspected of sponsoring terrorism, producing nuclear weapons or committing serious human rights abuses. This was done with European backing (China-Tiananmen Square protests) but also unilaterally (Cuba and Iran). This support for anti-communist movements in countries with left-wing regimes was known as the Reagan Doctrine. (6)

In 1983 Reagan announced the development of a project called The Strategic Defence Initiative(SDI) or Star Wars. This consisted of a defensive shield built in space, which would use satellites and space-based lasers to stop Soviet missiles travelling to the US. This project was extremely ambitious and would cost billions to realize. Furthermore, much of the technology required had not been developed. **The announcement of the SDI was significant.** Some historians believe that Reagan knew this project was not realistic and cleverly began the project to deliberately try and bankrupt the USSR as they attempted to develop their own version. (6)

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the USSR. **Significantly, his reformist policies would lead to the fall of Communism in the Eastern bloc and an end to the Cold War.** Policies of economic modernisation(Perestroika) and openness(Glasnost) promised greater freedom for Soviet society and Eastern Europe. Both Reagan and Gorbachev were eager to improve relations and ready to negotiate. The latter knew the economic burden being placed on the USSR and the former wanted to be remembered as a statesman that helped end the cold war. The atmosphere was positive when the two leaders met in Geneva in 1985 and Reykjavik in 1986. In 1987 Both leaders signed the INF(Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) Treaty. This was the first time nuclear weapons had been eliminated. (7)

The significance of Gorbachev's coming to power as Russian Premier cannot be overstated. Soviet leadership became less able or willing to suppress domestic pressures for increased political freedom. Eastern-bloc countries were allowed choose their own path in free elections without interference from Moscow. In November 1989 the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, a major symbol of the Cold War, dramatically illustrated the decline of the communist threat. Within the next two years, the Soviet Union disintegrated economically and politically and collapsed at the end of 1991, and **significantly, left the US as the dominant global power and Cold War victor.** (7)

CM= 71/60

OE= 40/40

Total= 100%

