Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Superpower relations and the Cold War, 1941–91

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The origins of the Cold War, 1941–58

- The **Grand Alliance** of the USA, the USSR and Britain met at Tehran (1943), Yalta (February 1945) and Potsdam (July–August 1945). Tension grew over Poland, Germany and the USA's atomic bomb.
- In 1946, the American diplomat George Kennan's '**Long Telegram**' warned that the USSR wanted to expand, while the Soviet 'Novikov Telegram' claimed the USA was seeking world domination.
- The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan (1947) were answered by Cominform (1947) and Comecon (1949). The Berlin Blockade (1948–49) led to the division of Germany and the creation of NATO (1949). The Warsaw Pact followed in 1955.
- The arms race grew, and in 1956 Soviet forces crushed the Hungarian Uprising.

Cold War crises, 1958–70

- Berlin: in 1958, Khrushchev demanded that Western troops leave West Berlin. Summits at Geneva and Camp David (1959) failed to settle it, the Paris summit (1960) collapsed after the U2 incident, and the Vienna summit (1961) went badly. In August 1961, the Berlin Wall was built, and in October 1961 American and Soviet tanks faced each other at Checkpoint Charlie.
- Cuba: after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion (1961) came the Cuban Missile Crisis (October 1962). Afterwards came the hotline and the Limited Test Ban Treaty (1963), the Outer Space Treaty (1967) and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968).
- Czechoslovakia: the Prague Spring (1968) was crushed by Warsaw Pact troops, and the Brezhnev Doctrine followed.

Détente and its collapse, 1970–84

- **Détente**: **SALT** 1 (1972) limited nuclear weapons, the Apollo–Soyuz mission (1975) was a joint space flight, and the Helsinki Agreements (1975) included human rights. **SALT** 2 was signed in 1979, but the US Senate never ratified it.
- The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (December 1979) ended **détente**. The Carter Doctrine, a grain embargo and the US-led boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics followed; the USSR boycotted the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.
- President Reagan took a hard line, the 'Second Cold War': he called the USSR an 'evil empire' (1983), announced the Strategic Defense Initiative ('Star Wars', 1983) and supported anti-communist groups.

The end of the Cold War, 1985–91

- Mikhail Gorbachev became Soviet leader in 1985. He introduced **glasnost** (openness) and **perestroika** (restructuring), and his 'new thinking' in foreign policy included the **Sinatra Doctrine**, which let Eastern European countries choose their own way.
- Summits with Reagan at Geneva (1985), Reykjavik (1986) and Washington (1987) led to the **INF Treaty** (1987), which removed all intermediate-range nuclear missiles. Soviet troops left Afghanistan by 1989.
- The Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989, and communist governments across Eastern Europe collapsed. The Warsaw Pact ended in 1991, and the USSR broke up in December 1991.

Key terms

Grand Alliance	The wartime alliance of the USA, the USSR and Britain.
Long Telegram	Kennan's 1946 warning about Soviet aims.
Satellite state	A country controlled by the USSR, such as Poland.
Brinkmanship	Pushing a crisis to the edge of war to force the other side to back down.
Détente	An easing of tension between the superpowers.
SALT	The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, which limited nuclear weapons.
Glasnost	'Openness': Gorbachev's policy of more freedom of speech.
Perestroika	'Restructuring': Gorbachev's reform of the Soviet economy.
INF Treaty	The 1987 treaty that removed intermediate-range nuclear missiles.
Sinatra Doctrine	Gorbachev's policy of letting Eastern European countries choose their own path.

Your notes

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What was the Long Telegram (1946)?
2. What was the Novikov Telegram (1946)?
3. What was Khrushchev's Berlin ultimatum of 1958?
4. What did the Outer Space Treaty (1967) ban?
5. What was SALT 1 (1972)?
6. What was the Apollo–Soyuz mission (1975)?
7. Which event ended détente in 1979?
8. Which Olympic Games did the USA boycott?

Answers

1. An American diplomat's warning that the USSR wanted to expand
2. A Soviet report claiming the USA wanted world domination
3. A demand that Western troops leave West Berlin
4. Nuclear weapons in space
5. An agreement limiting nuclear weapons
6. A joint American and Soviet space mission
7. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan
8. Moscow 1980

What to do next

Practise 13 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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