

## **The End of the Cold War – Placard N**

The Cold War also took a toll on the superpowers. **The cost of their rivalry, both in financial and human terms, was enormous. At times it seemed that the struggle would go on forever.** Eventually, however, Soviet power declined, and the Cold War came to an end.

**Challenges to Soviet Power** The Soviet Union dominated Eastern Europe for more than forty years. The collection of these countries—known collectively as the Soviet bloc—was critical to Soviet power. **At times, however, the people of Eastern Europe tried to escape Soviet domination.**

In October 1956, **Hungarians mounted a revolt against their government and its Soviet backers.** At the time, the USSR had a new leader, Nikita Khrushchev, who had replaced Stalin after his death in 1953. Khrushchev had publicly criticized Stalin's harsh rule and called for a more humane path to communism. But this new approach did not include letting Soviet satellites leave the Soviet sphere of influence. **Khrushchev ordered an invasion of Hungary to crush the rebellion. Some 20,000 Hungarians died and a new, Soviet-controlled government was installed.** Twelve years later, in 1968, the Warsaw Pact nations invaded Czechoslovakia to crush another reform movement.

Meanwhile, **thousands of Eastern Europeans tried to flee to a better life in the West.** This migration was most evident in East Germany. By 1961, 2.6 million East Germans had fled by crossing the border between East and West Berlin and then moving on to West Germany. To stop the flow, **the Soviet Union built a wall separating the two halves of the city.** The Berlin Wall was up to 15 feet high and 100 miles long and included guard towers and minefields. **The Berlin Wall was patrolled by soldiers who had orders to kill anyone who tried to cross.** Khrushchev admitted that the wall was a "hateful thing," but he believed it was necessary to preserve communism. President Kennedy called the wall a "vivid demonstration of the failures of the communist system."

## The End of the Cold War



The Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (right) poses with Vice President George H.W. Bush and President Ronald Reagan in New York during his 1988 visit to the United States.

## **The End of the Cold War – Placard O**

**Easing Cold War Tensions** By the 1970s, Cold War tensions began to ease up. Leaders on both sides embraced the idea of **détente**, a French word that means a **relaxation of tensions**. Behind this effort to reduce tensions, however, was the continued threat of nuclear war.

Until the late 1960s, the United States had **held the edge in the arms race**. With its **more advanced nuclear arsenal**, the United States believed it could force the Soviet Union to back down in any serious dispute. It was even willing to go to the brink of war—a policy known as brinkmanship—to make its point. This policy was based on the notion of **deterrence**, the idea that a country will not risk war if it faces the prospect of certain destruction.

By 1969, however, the Soviet Union had caught up in the arms race. Each side was now equally capable of destroying the other. They also realized that their huge military costs were harming their economies. As a result, both nations sought ways to curb the arms race and reduce the risk of nuclear conflict.

Détente began under U.S. President Richard Nixon. With his Soviet counterpart, Leonid Brezhnev, Nixon negotiated an important arms reduction agreement, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), in 1972. This treaty limited the number of nuclear weapons each side could possess. Nixon also reached out to China, making a historic visit to Beijing in 1972.

By normalizing relations with China, Nixon hoped to reduce tensions in East Asia. But he also hoped to play China and the USSR off against each other. At the time, the two communist powers were locked in a bitter rivalry to lead the communist world. They were willing to improve relations with the United States to further their own strategic interests.

Détente continued through the 1970s. The United States and the USSR expanded trade links and increased cultural and scientific exchanges. However, continued frictions—including arms-control disputes—eventually brought détente to an end. The final blow came with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

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On November 9, 1989, the government of East Germany opened the Berlin Wall so people could travel freely to the West. This photo shows young people climbing on top of the wall in celebration.

## **The End of the Cold War – Placard P**

**The Afghan War** Communists seized power in Afghanistan in 1978. Civil war broke out, and Muslim rebels threatened to topple the government. The Soviet Union sent in troops to occupy the country and prop up the regime. In response, the United States imposed tough sanctions on the Soviet Union, including a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics. It also began supplying arms and aid to the Afghan rebels. The Cold War was back in full force.

Soviet leaders expected a quick victory in Afghanistan. But like the United States in Vietnam, **the USSR soon got bogged down. They poured more money and troops into a war they could not win. The Soviet economy suffered, and thousands of Soviet soldiers lost their lives. The Afghan war undermined the power and credibility of the Soviet state. The last Soviet forces left the country in 1989.**

**The Soviet Decline** Afghanistan was just one of many problems afflicting the USSR by the late 1980s. In fact, the Soviet system itself was in crisis.

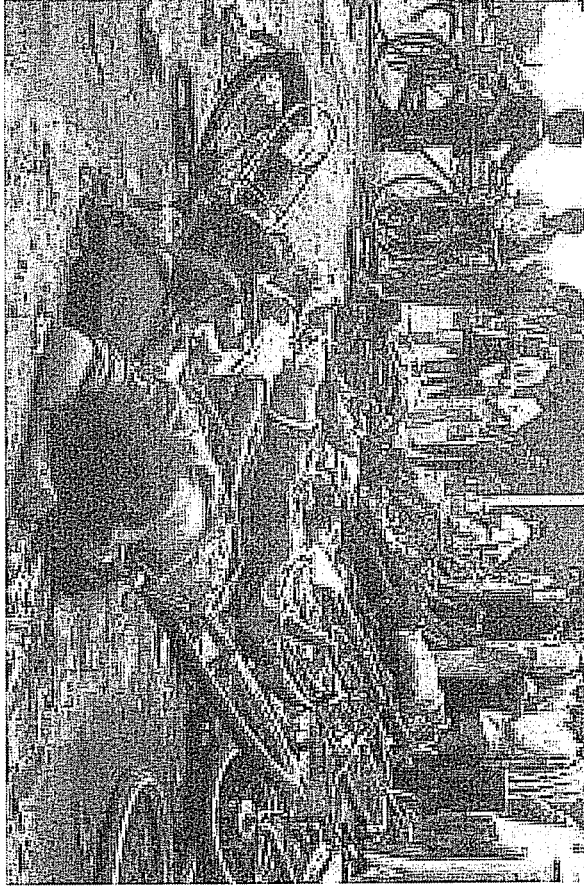
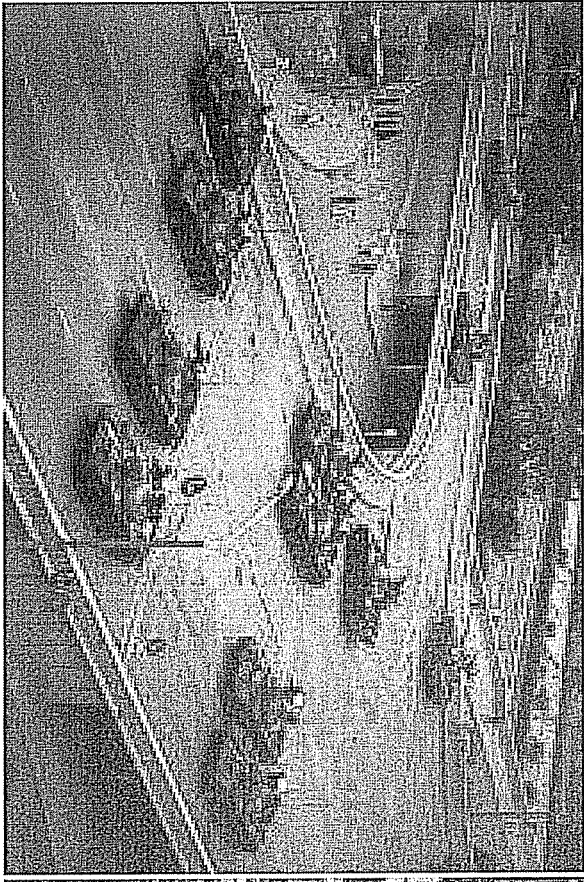
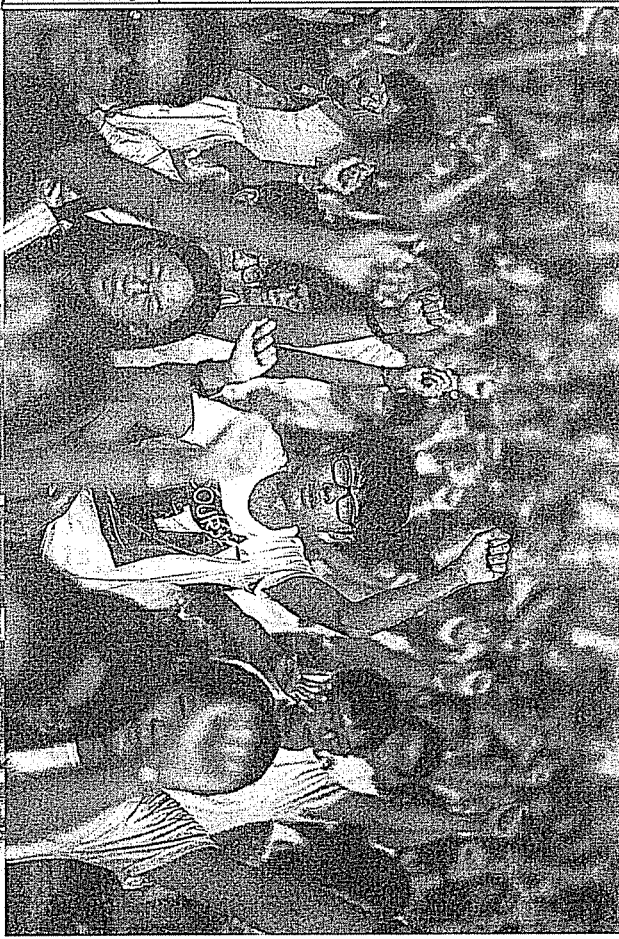
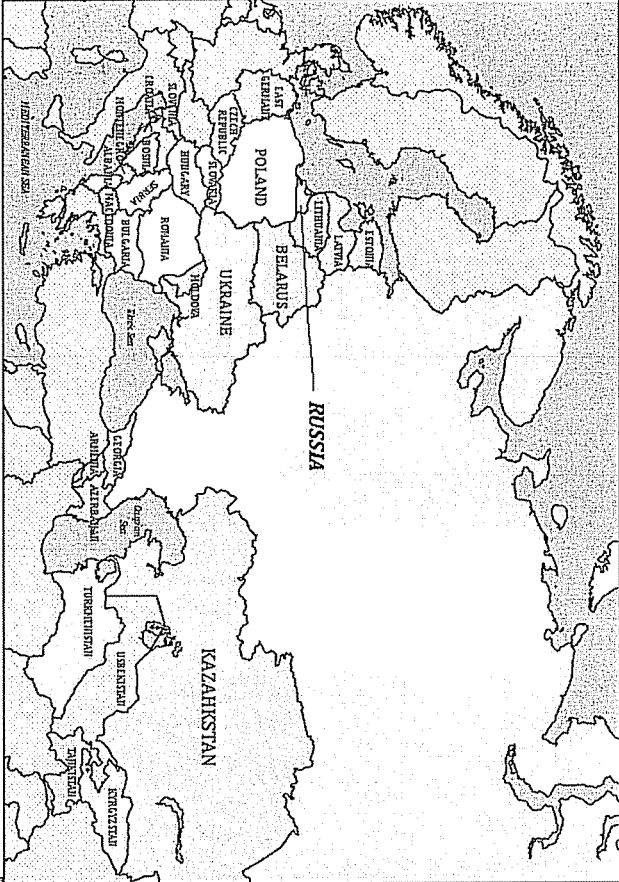
**The main problem was economic. The state-run Soviet economy could not compete with the private enterprise system of the capitalist West. Soviet citizens had low living standards, and basic goods were in short supply. Although the Soviet people received free public services, such as health care and education, the quality of these services was often poor. Soviet citizens also had less personal freedom than their counterparts in the West. When they saw images of Western life, many Soviet people felt their own lives were lacking. As a result, dissatisfaction spread through Soviet society.**

In 1985, however, a new Soviet leader came to power. Mikhail Gorbachev (mik-ah-IL GOR-beh-CHOF) was a dynamic reformer who was determined to change the Soviet system. Gorbachev believed that conflict between communism and capitalism was not inevitable. Like another Soviet reformer, Khrushchev, he argued **that East and West could peacefully coexist**, rather than pursuing an endless struggle for power. He also wanted to promote “communism with a human face” by embracing universal values, such as freedom of thought and expression.

Gorbachev proposed two main avenues of reform to revive the Soviet Union. One was called **perestroika, or restructuring. Perestroika was intended to make the Soviet economy more efficient and productive.** Perestroika reduced central planning and adopted some **limited free-market policies** in light industry and services. For the first time since the 1920s, **people were allowed to open small private businesses**, such as cafes and repair shops. **Gorbachev’s second main reform was glasnost, or openness. Glasnost encouraged Soviet citizens to voice new ideas and suggest ways to improve society. The free flow of ideas was seen as essential to economic reform. Gradually, glasnost introduced greater freedom of the press and of public speech to Soviet society.**



End of the Cold War – Placard Q



## **The End of the Cold War – Placard Q**

Gorbachev also sought improved relations with the West, including new arms-control agreements. U.S. President Ronald Reagan was at first skeptical. But he eventually recognized Gorbachev as a genuine reformer. The two pursued a renewed effort at arms control. Relations between the United States and Soviet Union warmed (improved) to levels that had not been seen since World War II.

Eastern European satellite nations, unleashed a popular push for democratization across the Soviet bloc. In 1989, the countries of Eastern Europe threw off communist rule, one after the other. On November 9th the Berlin Wall came down, a powerful moment for Europe and the world. The following year, Germany was reunited. The Soviet Union itself collapsed in 1991, dissolving into 15 separate states. The Cold War was over.