

Edexcel GCSE History



Your notes

The 'Second Cold War'

Contents

- * Ronald Reagan & the 'Second Cold War'
- * The Olympic Boycotts



Your notes

Ronald Reagan & the 'Second Cold War'

Why did Reagan's Presidency Start the Second Cold War? – Summary

The Soviet invasion of **Afghanistan (1979)** and **Ronald Reagan's first term as president (1981–85)** marks a period that historians refer to as the '**Second Cold War**'. After a period of **détente** in the 1970s, the beginning of the 1980s saw a **worsening of US–Soviet relations**. The relationship between the USA and the Soviet Union became **hostile**.

The 1979 invasion aimed to install a **pro–Soviet government in Afghanistan**. The Soviet government continued to send troops into the country for the next **decade**. The conflict between the Soviet Union and the **Mujahideen cost the Soviet Union \$80 billion and the death of 15,000 Soviet troops**.

The USA also became more aggressive in its actions. Reagan made **verbal and physical attacks on communism** throughout his first presidency. He made it clear to the US public and the Soviet Union his intention to '**roll back**' and '**eliminate**' **communism**. His actions proved that Reagan would not collaborate with the Soviet Union. He introduced policies like the **Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)**. He aimed to **destroy the Soviet economy** and, in turn, the Soviet Union itself.

Who was Ronald Reagan?

- Ronald Reagan became the President of the USA in **1981**
 - Reagan was the Governor of California from 1967 to 1975
 - He was a **Republican**
- Before Reagan's career in politics, **he was an actor**
 - Over a 30–year career, Reagan appeared in more than 50 films
- **Reagan held strong opinions about communism**
 - Communism went against his Christian and **conservative** values

EXAM TIP



The Superpower Relations paper does not require an in-depth knowledge of Ronald Reagan. Try to remember that Reagan acted differently from Carter and Nixon. In his first term as president, Reagan

did not want to collaborate with the Soviet Union. He used his conservative values to make the USA stand up against communism.



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Reagan's Attitude Towards the Soviet Union & the 'Evil Empire' Speech

- Reagan believed that communism posed a significant threat to the USA
 - Reagan persuaded the US **Congress** to **increase military spending**
 - In **1982**, the **USA spent almost 7% of its GDP on the defence budget**
 - Reagan encouraged the development of new weapons such as **Trident** and **stealth bombers**
- The Reagan Doctrine aimed to:
 - Give support to **anti-communist** groups attempting to overthrow communist governments
 - The US government **financed** the efforts of anti-communist groups in El Salvador
 - **The US army invaded and overthrew the communist government in Grenada**
 - 'Rollback' communism
 - Reagan wanted to remove the influence of communism from other parts of the world. This would keep **communism in the Soviet Union**
- Reagan made a key speech stating his opinions of communism and the Soviet Union
 - On **8th March 1983**, Reagan made a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals (a Christian organisation)
 - The image below shows some key quotes from Reagan's speech:



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RONALD REAGAN

[THE SOVIET UNION IS] AN EVIL EMPIRE

AMERICA IS GOOD. AND IF AMERICA EVER CEASES TO BE GOOD, AMERICA WILL CEASE TO BE GREAT

I BELIEVE THAT COMMUNISM IS ANOTHER SAD, BIZARRE CHAPTER IN HUMAN HISTORY WHOSE LAST PAGES EVEN NOW ARE BEING WRITTEN

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An image showing the important messages from Reagan's 'Evil Empire' speech on 8th March 1983

EXAM TIP



Reagan's actions are similar to the US policy of **containment** at the start of the Cold War. This is important to remember when considering the narrative of the Cold War. Reagan's presidency



Your notes

increased Cold War tensions back to the levels seen in the 1950s and 1960s. The evidence for this is Reagan's invasion of Grenada. This event is comparable to Kennedy's [invasion of Cuba](#) in 1961. Both invasions aimed to overthrow a communist government and push the threat of communism away from the USA.

The Strategic Defense Initiative: the Star Wars Program

- Reagan introduced the **Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)** in **1983**
 - A popular nickname for the SDI was 'Star Wars'
- The SDI involved:
 - Sending satellites into **orbit**
 - These satellites would have the capability of **shooting down Soviet missiles by laser**
- Reagan announced the SDI to the **US public on 23rd March 1983**
 - At this point, the US scientists **had not developed the technology** to implement the SDI
 - Reagan did not inform the US public that the technology did not exist
 - In the next decade, the US government spent **\$30 billion** attempting to create the SDI

The Soviet Union's Reaction to the SDI

- The US announcement of the SDI **shocked the Soviet Union**
 - The Soviet government had spent an unsustainable amount of money developing **nuclear technology** to the same levels as the USA
 - By the **1980s, the Soviet economy was failing**
 - The Soviet Union **could not afford to create a new weapons system**
- The Soviet Union saw the SDI as a significant threat to their safety
 - The **SDI broke the 1967 Outer Space Treaty**, which banned the use of space for military purposes
 - The Soviet Union believed the USA was becoming **more aggressive** towards them

The Impact of the SDI on Cold War Relations

- The SDI showed the growing gap between the USA and the Soviet Union's economy

- Reagan knew that the **US government could out-spend the Soviet Union**. The US government did not believe that the SDI would become a reality
- Announcing the SDI was a **tactic to force the Soviet Union to collapse or to accept defeat in the Cold War**. This worsened US-Soviet relations
- The Soviet Union's belief that the USA could develop the SDI showed the USA's technological advantage
 - **The USA's development of computers boosted their economy**
 - By 1983, the computer company Apple earned nearly **\$1 billion in sales**
 - In comparison, the Soviet Union did not have the same level of computer technology
 - A lack of **consumerism** meant that **Soviet goods were of poor quality**
 - The Soviet Union experienced a **skill gap**. Many engineers had left East Germany during the [Berlin Refugee Crisis](#) in the 1950s.
 - The Soviet Union would have to develop better computers before it could create a system like the SDI
- **The SDI forced the Soviet Union to reform**
 - Mikhail Gorbachev became the new Soviet leader in 1985
 - Gorbachev developed a policy called 'new thinking'. A part of Gorbachev's policy aimed to **reform the Soviet economy**



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WORKED EXAMPLE

Explain one consequence of the Strategic Defense Initiative (1983)

4 marks

Answer:

One consequence of the Strategic Defense Initiative was increasing the technological gap between the USA and the Soviet Union. Reagan announced the SDI to the US public on 23rd March 1983. The SDI involved sending satellites into orbit with the capability of shooting down Soviet missiles by laser. The announcement of the SDI scared the Soviet Union. The Soviet government did not possess the technology to produce a comparable weapons system. This highlighted the technology gap between the two countries. The Soviet Union did not have advanced computer technology like the USA. It also did not have the skilled engineers and scientists to produce this

technology. The SDI, even just as an idea, showed that the USA possessed much more technical ability than the Soviet Union.

EXAM TIP

A high-standard response to this question needs to **explain what the SDI caused to happen**. There are many different approaches to this question. You could explain how the SDI showed how advanced the US economy was in comparison to the Soviet Union's. Ensure that you explain in detail using specific own knowledge how the SDI caused your chosen consequence to occur. In this example, you can see the use of accurate statistics and dates to support the argument.

This question has **previously** asked you to explain two consequences. In the Superpower Relations exam paper for **2025**, this question will ask you to explain **one** consequence. However, there will be **two different** "Explain one consequence of" questions, each worth four marks.



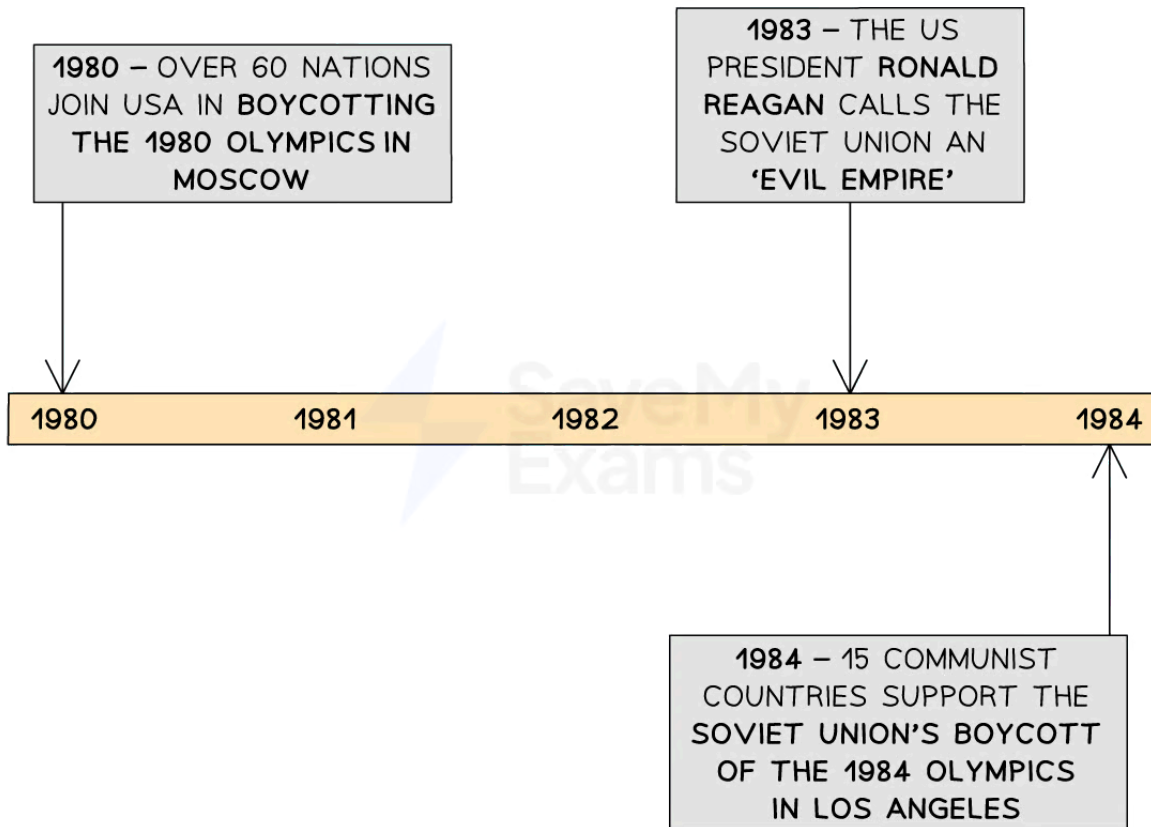
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The Olympic Boycotts

How did the Olympic Boycotts Cause the Second Cold War? – Timeline & Summary



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The US and Soviet **boycotts** impacted the **1980 Moscow Olympics** and the **1984 Los Angeles Olympics**. The USA boycotted to **condemn the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan**. The Soviet Union accused the US government of causing '**anti-Soviet hysteria**'. They **questioned the safety of Soviet athletes**. The

boycotts fit into this Second Cold War context. The USA and the Soviet Union openly **discredited** each other's political leadership. The boycotts brought politics into the Olympics. This went against the institution's aims for **unity** and friendship.



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What Caused the US Boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games?

- In December 1979, the **Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan**
 - The US government believed that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was an attempt to spread communism in an **anti-communist** state
 - In **January 1980, President Carter created the Carter Doctrine**. This stated that:
 - **The USA would use force to protect the Persian Gulf**
 - Carter would impose **economic sanctions** on the Soviet Union
- The Soviet Union were hosting the next Olympic Games in Moscow in 1980
 - **The International Olympic Committee selected the Soviet Union to host the 1980 Olympics in 1974**
 - This reflected the mood of détente
- In reaction to the Soviet Union's actions in Afghanistan, the USA decided to **boycott** the 1980 Olympics
 - Over **60 nations** joined the USA's boycott

The Impact of the 1980 Boycott on Cold War Relations

- The US boycott of the 1980 Olympics **heightened Cold War tensions**
 - The US boycott showed the USA's reluctance to uphold the Olympic Values
 - The Olympic Values are '**excellence, respect and friendship**'
 - The International Olympic Committee argued that **politics should not influence the Olympic Games**
 - The USA's actions brought politics into the Olympics
- Some historians could argue that the Soviet Union went against the Olympic Values by invading Afghanistan



Your notes

- **The boycott affected the reputation of the Soviet Union**
 - The Soviet Union wanted to use the Olympics as an opportunity to **show the strength of communism** to a worldwide audience
 - **Many American networks cancelled their coverage of the Olympic Games.** This affected the viewing figures of the Olympics in the West
- The boycott showed the measures that the USA would take to stand up against the Soviet Union
 - **The US government threatened the removal of passports** for any US athletes who attempted to travel to Moscow for the Olympics
 - Other boycotting countries like **Britain discouraged but did not ban athletes** from participating in the Olympics

EXAM TIP



A question could ask you to write a narrative account of the Second Cold War. This could include the Olympic boycotts. A common misconception that students have is that a narrative account is a story. A narrative account answer should follow **CHRONOLINK**:

- Put the sequence of events in **chronological order**
- **Link each section of the narrative to the next event** that occurred. You should use linkage terms such as: 'as a consequence', 'this led to' or 'because'

You should have three sections to your narrative. Each section should include specific knowledge about the events in the narrative. Your answer should include process words such as 'affected', 'increased' and 'worsened.' This allows you to move through the narrative and explain how key themes like tension developed through the chosen event.

The Soviet Union's Reaction: the Boycott of the 1984 Olympic Games

- The US boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games had made the Moscow Olympics look **substandard**
 - Some of the best athletes in the world did not attend
 - This impacted **how professional the events looked** to the international audience
 - The **lower viewing figures** for the 1980 Olympics meant that the Soviet Union lost the opportunity to showcase communism to the world
- **The USA hosted the next Olympic Games in 1984**
 - The host city was Los Angeles

The US boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics worsened US-Soviet relations. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. In protest of the event, the USA along with over 60 other nations boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics. This worsened US-Soviet relations as the protest limited the impact of the Soviet Olympics on the West. The Soviet Union hoped to gain a worldwide audience to demonstrate the strength of communism. As many Western and Islamic athletes did not compete, many television companies did not broadcast the Moscow Olympics to their audience. This worsened US-Soviet relations as the Soviet Union became more hostile to the USA. When the Olympics were held in Los Angeles in 1984, the Soviet Union organised their own boycott of the event.



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EXAM TIP

This style of question in the exam paper would be worth **8 marks**. An examiner would expect you to write **two paragraphs** analysing the importance of an event on a wider theme like US-Soviet relations. A good response to this style of question would have:

- A **logical structure** of paragraphs. Within each paragraph, each sentence should link to the next. This will **build a strong argument** as to why the event is important to the wider theme
- **Specific own knowledge** linked to the event, showing in-depth knowledge of the period
- A clear **explanation** as to why the event was important to a **wider theme**. In the example above, you can see the phrase 'this worsened US-Soviet relations' is used frequently. This helps to keep the response focused on the question