

History, The Cold War: Superpower relations between 1941-1991

Lesson 24 of 30

Worksheet

Why did detente not last?



Why did detente start to fail at the end of the 1970s?

By the end of the **1970s, détente was already starting to fail.** The relaxation of tensions which had characterised the Cold War for the last decade was nearly over. **SALT 2 was never ratified** by the US Senate and the co-operation of the 1970s was replaced with a renewal of tension in the 1980s.

Reason 1: the **US did not trust the Soviet Union.** Politicians from both political parties – Democrats (President Carter's party) and the opposition Republicans said that **Communists could not be trusted.** The Soviets were increasingly **supporting Communist groups outside the USSR** and the Eastern Bloc such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Angola. Some Americans saw the co-operation of **detente as a sign of weakness.**



Why did detente start to fail at the end of the 1970s?

Reason 2: in November 1979 the **US embassy in Tehran, in Iran was attacked** and more than 60 were held hostage for 444 days. American diplomats and their families were publicly humiliated. **Some Americans blamed detente for this attack, saying it had made the US look weak.** They wanted the US to prove they were strong so that attacks like this would not happen again.

Reason 3 Carter's advisers wanted him to be firmer with the Soviet Union.

Reason 4 December 1979, **Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.**



Why was Afghanistan important to the Soviet Union?

Afghanistan is in Central Asia, near the Persian Gulf, with Iran to the west and Pakistan to the east. In 1979, it also **bordered the southern parts of the USSR**. To understand the importance of Afghanistan to the Soviet Union, and therefore how it helped to end detente, we need to know Iran's history in the 1970s.

Iranian Revolution, February 1979

In 1979 there was a **revolution** and the **leader of Iran, known as the Shah, was replaced by a fundamentalist Muslim government**. The Soviet Union did not want Muslim fundamentalism to spread to the central Asian states in the USSR, as they had large Muslim populations which might be tempted to support rather Islam, rather than the USSR. They **did not want Communist ideology to be undermined by Islam**. The Soviet Union wanted to **protect its own interests** and therefore **needed a pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan**. This means a government that would work to protect the interests of the USSR. The Soviet Union was also interested in maintaining influence in the Persian Gulf area because they **wanted access to oil in the region**.



Soviet invasion of Afghanistan 1979

The Soviets were so keen to **protect their interests in the Persian Gulf (oil) and to stop the spread of Muslim fundamentalism** through Afghanistan into the southern region of the USSR that they invaded Afghanistan. The Iranian **Revolution** was concluded by February 1979 but the Soviets did not invade Afghanistan until December.

- **April 1978 a pro-Soviet government took over in Afghanistan** and got economic support from the Soviet Union.
- September 1979, Hafizullah **Amin staged a popular coup** and was initially supported by the Soviets. He began to lose popularity and **pro-Muslim groups were trying to get rid of Amin.**
- When Brezhnev heard that Amin might be talking to the Americans, he took action and, on **24th December 1979, he ordered Soviet forces to invade.**



- The Soviets said they have been invited by Amin, but, 3 days after the invasion, on 27th December 1979, **Amin was assassinated**, probably by Soviet commandos and was **replaced by a pro-Soviet leader Babrak Kamal**.

Following the invasion, the **Soviets stayed fighting in Afghanistan for 10 years**, spending \$8 billion each year they were there. 15,000 Soviet soldiers died as well as around 1.5 million Afghan civilians.

This aggressive action by the Soviet Union effectively ended detente.



US response to Soviet invasion

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led to the end of detente because although the Soviets invaded to protect their interests in a country on their border, the **Americans** saw things differently. They **saw the invasion as an attempt by the Soviets to expand Communist influence**, which they had been **working to stop** since containment was embedded in US foreign policy **by the Truman Doctrine** in 1947. President Carter had been urged by his advisors to make a show of US strength to the Soviets and he did so in his reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In **January 1980**, Carter made a speech to the American people which became known as the **Carter Doctrine**. It was modelled on the Truman Doctrine to emphasise its importance. The Carter Doctrine said that *"an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be **repelled by any means necessary, including military force**."* Carter said that the invasion was the greatest threat to world peace since WW2. As a result, he **withdrew SALT 2 from the Senate** so it was never **ratified**. He **increased military spending and imposed economic sanctions**. He also **provided the mujahideen** (the group fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan) with **money and weapons**.



The Olympic boycotts

During detente, as a sign of the relaxation of tension, the US took part in sports against Communist countries, for example when the US table tennis team toured China. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, **part of the US response was to boycott the Summer Olympics taking place in Moscow in 1980**. Over 60 other countries supported the **boycott**, and this action had a huge impact on the games. The Olympics has huge television audiences and events are shown all over the world. The **Soviets were hoping to use the events to show how good Communism was**. The US were so influential, however, that lots of athletes from different countries did not attend. Some were prevented from attending by their country, for example, the US threatened to remove the passports of any US athletes that went to Moscow. Countries such as Britain allowed athletes to compete as individuals. **As a result of the boycott, some of the best athletes in the world did not attend which made the Moscow Olympics look bad**. The Soviets could not prove how good their athletes were, as they were not competing against everyone. **Relations remained bad**, and, in **1984** when the **Olympics were in Los Angeles** in America, they were **boycotted by the Soviets and 15 other countries**.



Glossary

Revolution - forcibly overthrowing a government in favour of a new system

Shah - king or emperor

Fundamentalism - strict form of religion, based on religious scripture

Coup - a sudden, violent, illegal takeover of a government

Commandos - specially trained soldiers

Carter Doctrine - 1980 statement of US foreign policy

Economic sanctions - actions designed to damage a country's economy to get them to change their actions or behaviour

Boycott - not taking part in an event or associating with people or countries as a protest



Comprehension Questions

1. Why did the Soviets invade Afghanistan?
2. How did the US respond to the invasion of Afghanistan?
3. What was the Carter Doctrine and why was it important?
4. How did the Olympic Boycotts worsen international relations?
5. **Challenge question:** Explain why detente did not last.

Detente did not last because...

*[**hint:** think about the actions of both sides]*

*This led to.....[**hint:** think about Western and Soviet reaction to each other]*

*As a result.....[**hint:** how would this impact their relationship?]*

*Therefore.....[**hint:** what has happened to tension in the Cold War?]*

