How did the USSR establish control over Eastern Europe (1945 – 1949)

Poland

Communism was imposed on Poland via a Soviet-controlled government. The Polish Committee for National Liberation was Stalin’s instrument of political control. By agreeing to free elections at Yalta, Stalin was able to preserve the role of the Pro-Moscow Lublin government. Poland became a testing ground for Stalin’s methodology. Poland had a peasant party, led by Stanisław Mikolajczyk. This group was weakened by the Communists when they strengthened their links with the Polish socialists. In January 1947, these two groups merged and the Communists became the dominant group.

Romania

With the Soviet Army of Liberation in Romania, the king was forced to appoint a Communist-led government. The Communists were popular because they offered an alternative to the pre-war regime. The establishment of communism in Romania was easy for Stalin, as opposition was minimal and easy to deal with.

Hungary

The Communists used the tactic of allying with other political groups in order to change the power of their greatest opponents – The Smallholders Party. Political opponents were arrested and elections were rigged. Hungarians weren’t as loyal to Moscow as Stalin had hoped.

Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia was industrialised and had a large urban working class. Czech Communists were popular with the rural peasants because they had given them land during the war. The Czech Communist Party’s leader became Prime Minister. The non-Communists in government resigned in 1948. The Communists presented this as an attempt to create right wing conservative group. President Benes agreed to support a Communist dominated government. He resigned in June 1948 and left the Pro-Moscow Communists in control.
Relations between America, China and the Soviet Union

The Nixon administration regarded ‘Detente’ as a process based on negotiation rather than confrontation. Kissinger saw ‘Detente’ as a strategy rather than an objective, “‘Detente’ is a way of controlling the conflict with the Soviet Union’.

Both Nixon and Kissinger aimed to draw the Soviet Union into a state of interdependency with the USA. ‘Detente’ was about creating a network of mutually advantageous relationships, so that it would not be in the USSR’s interest to base its policies on confrontation with the United States. This would enable the USA to be in a position to ‘manage’ Soviet international power. Kissinger summed up the USA’s aims, ‘By acquiring a stake in this network of relationships with the West, the Soviet Union may become more conscious of what it will lose by a return to confrontation. Indeed, it is our expectation that it will develop self-interest in fostering the entire process of relaxation of tensions’.

Brezhnev saw ‘Detente’ as a means of overcoming the Cold War and the route by which ‘normal’, equal relations could be restored between the states. He saw ‘Detente’ as advantageous for both the East and the West. ‘Detente’ was made possible from the Soviet perspective, as by the late 1960’s, the USSR had established nuclear equality with the USA. This equality put the Soviet Union in a position to co-operate with the United States. The USSR took the view that the USA was no longer the dominant world power and the Soviet Union were now in a position to gain by being able to co-operate with the United States. ‘Detente’ was a way in which the Soviets could preserve world socialism and protect it from the threat posed from the western capitalists.

Sino-American Relations

Following the takeover of China by the Communists in 1949, the United States refused to recognise the legitimacy of the People’s Republic of China. However, as Nixon came to power he recognised the importance that a relationship with the Chinese could play, ‘We must not forget China. We must always seek opportunities to talk with her. We must not only watch for changes. We must seek changes.’ Nixon realised that China was a developing nuclear power and a major political and strategic force in Asia.

The first steps towards a better relationship came in July 1969 when the United States removed some of their trade controls and relaxed some travel restrictions. Nixon also managed a number of diplomatic contacts through France, Romania and Pakistan, with which he aimed to show the willingness of the US in working towards improving Sino-American relations.

The relationship between China and the USSR slowly worsened over time. Ideological differences and the dispute over who was to lead Communism forward started to crack the relationship between the two main Communist states. The split was out in the open in 1960, when Peng Zhen and Khrushchev had an argument at the Romanian Communist Party Congress. Following this argument, Soviet experts were removed from China.

By early 1970, some initial diplomatic connections between China and the United States had been established in Warsaw. In August 1970, Zhou Enlai achieved a major victory over those opposed to China opening improved relations with the USA. There was a shift in policy away from the dual confrontation with both the USA and the USSR towards the recognition that the Soviet Union now
The Second Cold War

Ronald Reagan and US Militarism During the 1980’s

Reagan was a Hollywood film actor before becoming Governor of California in 1966. His presidency lasted from 1981 to 1989. He was a right wing Republican and during his presidency cut taxes and spending on domestic social programmes whilst increasing military spending. In 1983, he invaded Granada to remove a Marxist regime and also backed the funding of anti-Communist groups in Nicaragua.

A speech made before Parliament in Britain (June 1982) set the tone for Reagan’s relationship with the USSR. Reagan wouldn’t contemplate war in an attempt to remove the Soviet Union’s ideological, political and economic hold of Eastern Europe.

Reagan was determined to change Soviet behaviour by pursuing aggressive policies. He was convinced that détente had resulted in the USA’s trust in the USSR being misplaced. He placed blame upon previous administrators for allowing America’s global power to be lessened due to being taken advantage of. He also described the Soviet leaders as ‘the focus of evil in the modern world’ and blamed them for being the underlying factor in all unrest throughout the world. Reagan believed in abandoning détente and any ties that the USA had with the USSR over military matters. This, he believed, would enable the US to restore its military strength.

Regan aimed to restore the United States’ pride in itself. He was fearful that the Soviets would still have expansionistic tendencies and that their ideology would spread unless contained. The belief led to the end of détente and led to the return of the USA’s attempts to contain the Soviets, which in turn brought about the risk of confrontation.

Soviet Reaction Up To 1985

The Soviet Union wanted to return to détente and there was a short period where the Country was expectant that Reagan would support this, yet this was quickly undermined by his confrontational attitude towards both détente and the USSR. The years 1981 and 1982 saw the Soviet leaders promoting the need for communication between themselves and the United States. The Soviet leaders increasingly began to believe that Reagan was interested in confrontation and Cold War, rather than containment and competition that had characterised détente.

Following the death of Brezhnev in 1982, Yuri Andropov took the reins of the Soviet Union. He, as was Brezhnev, was committed to reviving détente, but soon realised that this was something that the United States didn’t want to pursue. Brezhnev described the US-Soviet relationship as one that was marked by confrontation.

Soviet-American relations took a huge blow on the 1st September 1983, when a Korean civil airliner, KAL 007, was shot down by a Soviet interceptor. It was claimed by the Soviets that the plane had been on an intelligence gathering mission, on behalf of the USA. This accusation was quickly denied by the United States who accused the USSR of wilfully shooting down a civil aircraft – in the process killing 269 people. The USA saw the act as that of Soviet barbarity, whilst the USSR saw it as one of
The Western alliance, which had been in place since the end of the Second World War, hadn’t been one of continuous harmony. Whilst American-Soviet détente collapsed at the beginning of the 1980’s, European détente flourished. Whilst the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan brought about the collapse of détente with the USA, Europe remained faithful to the policy. This differing in actions showed the lack of uniformity between the USA and Europe.

The lack of coordination had developed over decades and came to a head during the 1980’s. America had supported the growth of an ‘Atlantic Community’, but as Europe began to become a major economic power (one that was able to challenge the USA’s power economically) problems started to arise. As Europe’s economic strength grew, the USA began to question the extent of its own economic commitment to the strategic defence of Europe.

USA, Europe and Arms Control

The Reagan administration raised a number of problems between Europe and the USA. Europe doubted Reagan’s commitment to arms control. It feared the development of the USA’s unilateral arms build-up under Reagan, particularly the move towards SDI – which they saw as a threat to the ABM Treaty. Britain’s Foreign Secretary (Sir Geoffrey Howe) referred to the ABM Treaty as the ‘keystone in the arch of security’. It was felt that any threat to the ABM Treaty would risk an escalation in offensive weapon competition. Europe also saw SDI as part of an American plan aimed at isolationism and the possibility of the USA detaching itself from its commitment to defend Europe.

The American perspective was that Europe was too readily inclined to remain committed to détente and arms control – which went against the Reagan administration’s understanding of how America’s interests should be protected.

Despite the apparent rift in views between Europe and the USA, the two were still closely tied through NATO. A meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in May 1981 in which alliance policy was to be discussed, saw the USA pushing to remove any references to détente. This proposal was strongly opposed by the European allies and eventually the USA reluctantly accepted a commitment to a more constructive East-West relationship. This agreement went on to accept that the NATO allies would ‘maintain a dialogue with the Soviet Union and (would) work together for genuine détente and the development of East-West relations, whenever Soviet behaviour makes this possible’. In May 1982, the NATO allies not only reaffirmed the commitments, but they also recognised (as part of the Alliance security policy) the need for ‘arms control and disarmament, together with deterrence and defence.’

America’s commitment to Europe’s security also came through the INF debate. For the USA, the INF deployment was viewed as a means of reinforcing the alliance. Europe viewed the deployments as the USA attempting to influence European security and control European independence from the USA. Many Europeans saw the deployment as a way of the USA trying to be in a position from which they could manipulate Europe. November 1983 saw the United States confirm their plan for the
Mikhail Gorbachev

Gorbachev was born on the 2nd March 1931 into a peasant family in Stavropol. He joined the Communist Party in 1952 and in 1970 was appointed First Secretary for Agriculture, following his graduation from the Agricultural Institute as an agronomist-economist. In 1979 he became a member of the Politburo.

In December 1984 he delivered a major speech on ideology and the need for reform at a Party Conference. He became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1985, aged 54. During his first year as General Secretary he removed much of the ‘Old Guard’ within the Communist Party and also appointed the first non-Soviet to be foreign minister.

1986 saw Gorbachev implement the policies he is most renowned for. These policies were Perestroika (restructuring) and Glasnost (openness) and were seen as radical reforms by the Communist Party, which also played a part in the weakening of Communist power in the USSR. January 1987 saw him call for multi-candidate elections in the USSR.

In 1988 he made the decision to remove, the highly controversial, troops from Afghanistan and also to break away from the Brezhnev Doctrine and instead establish the Sinatra Doctrine. It was also in 1988 that Gorbachev became President of the Supreme Soviet. Throughout 1989 there were various revolutions throughout Eastern Europe, all which Gorbachev allowed despite opposition from other Communist led countries.

Gorbachev was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 1990. Soviet hardliners in August 1991 made an attempted coup to remove him, yet this was unsuccessful. He later resigned in December.

Throughout his time in office, he was convinced that the USSR was no longer capable of financing the Cold War. Therefore he was an advocate of stopping the arms race.
Gorbachev’s View of America and the West

- Gorbachev and Reagan struck a personal relationship following the Geneva Summit and decided to hold further meetings
- Initially considered Reagan to be ‘not simply a Conservative, but a political dinosaur.’
- Acknowledged that Reagan treated him with respect and later described him as a great man
- Wanted to improve relations and trade with the West by easing Cold War tensions
- Established close relations with several Western leaders, such as the West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (who famously remarked, ‘I like Mr. Gorbachev, we can do business together’)
- Was described affectionately as ‘Gorby’ in West Germany after he decided not to interfere with internal matters in Germany. He believed that German re-unification was an internal German matter
- Believed that in US-Soviet relations, security must be mutual and based on politics rather than military instruments
- Gorbachev characterised the US-Soviet relationship as a ‘partnership’
- ‘Americans have a severe – worse than AIDS. It’s called winner’s complex’
- ‘We had 10 years after the Cold War to build a new world order and yet we squandered them. The United States cannot tolerate anyone acting independently. Every US President has to have a war.’
- ‘I conclude therefore that we should not pay too much attention to what the West is saying.’
Eduard Shevardnadze, 1928-2014

First Secretary of the GCP

• Tasked with suppressing the black market capitalism that had emerged under his predecessor Vasit Mzhavanadze.
• Under his rule Georgia was one of the only Soviet states that did not suffer economic stagnation – instead experiencing extreme growth.
• Food queues in Tbilisi shortened, whilst those in Moscow lengthened.
• He was a vehement Communist and supporter of the Soviet state, removing the Georgian language as the national dialect and even stating that ‘For Georgians the sun does not rise in the east, but in the north, in Russia.’

Soviet Foreign Policy

• Shevardnadze was instrumental in ending the Cold War. He struck nuclear arms deals with the USA, ended the war in Afghanistan and advocated the reunification of Germany. Shevardnadze worked with Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko and Gorbachev.
• He earned the nickname ‘The Silver Fox’, due to his white hair and his reputation for being cunning.

The Collapse of the USSR

• Shevardnadze became increasingly unpopular and was in conflict with Soviet hardliners who disliked his reforms and his soft line with the West.
• In protest at the growing influence of hardliners under Gorbachev, Shevardnadze suddenly resigned in December 1990, saying ‘Dictatorship is coming.’
• Shevardnadze returned briefly as Soviet Foreign Minister in November 1991, but resigned with Gorbachev the following month when the Soviet Union was formally dissolved.

Georgian President

• Shevardnadze was first elected in 1995, winning with 70% of the votes and then he acquire a second term in 2000 – however, there were many accusations of a rigged ballot.
• There were three attempts on his life in 1992, 1995 and 1998 and there were also several separatist conflicts.

Downfall

• In November 2003, Georgia held a general election, which was largely seen as a sham. Riots broke out in Tbilisi in what is now known as the ‘Rose Revolution’.
• Shevardnadze was forced to escape parliament and soon resigned in order to avert a bloody power struggle.
Complications After the Geneva Summit

Gorbachev’s Initiative

Gorbachev wanted a spectacular initiative that would leave the clear impression that the USSR was serious about ending the nuclear arms race even though Reagan had shown unwillingness to compromise over SDI at Geneva.

Two months after the Geneva Summit, Gorbachev publically proposed that the US and the USSR commit themselves to ridding the world of nuclear weapons by 2000 and that the first step in that process would be a 50% cut in strategic nuclear weapons. This provoked a mixed reaction from Western powers. The USA welcomed the initiative, but weren’t prepared to suddenly abandon their SDI Programme. Both Britain and France refused to discuss the proposal, with Thatcher calling it ‘Pie in the Sky’.

The Chernobyl Disaster

The Chernobyl nuclear disaster of April 1986 had a profound impact on Gorbachev. He said the disaster revealed ‘the sickness of our system’ and that henceforth there would have to be ‘Glasnost’ and ‘Perestroika’ within the USSR. Gorbachev later acknowledged that ‘Chernobyl made me and my colleagues rethink a great many things’.

A Soviet Spy

In August 1986, a new conflict drove a wedge between Reagan and Gorbachev. A Soviet employee of the UN, Gennady Zakharov, was arrested for organizing spying activities against the USA. Zakharov was arrested on the 23 August as he was about to pay a double agent for a package of classified information.

The USSR responded by arresting Nicholas Daniloff, an American journalist based in Moscow. The problem was eventually resolved with Daniloff being released and Zakharov being expelled from the USA. This resolution opened the way for the summit in Reykjavik.
US Self Interest/Cooperation – Post Cold War

Self Interest

- United States needed to preserve its position as a global superpower, which was essential to guaranteeing that US national interests were secure (influence in Europe etc.) – which had been present in foreign policy throughout the Cold War.
- US acted separately from the United Nations – Intervention in Iraq (response to international aggression), showed that the USA wasn’t committed to cooperating with the UN as it needed to ensure its own interests were secure.
- Kuwait/Gulf War – United States wanted to protect its economic interests (USA provide $3 billion of trade to the region) and didn’t want to lose its ‘oil monopoly’ – Iraq control would mean that Saddam Hussein would have control of 2/3 of the world’s oil trade.

Cooperation

- Cooperation with the UN and NATO during the collapse of Yugoslavia – US recognised the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992) and also brokered the Dayton Agreement (1995).
- Somalia (1992-1995) – provision of 27,000 troops to provide security for UN aid. UNITAF was under US control – ‘Operation Restore Hope’.