MAD would be replaced by **MAS** – ‘mutual assured survival’ in the event of an attack on the US. But the new Soviet leader, **Andropov**, questioned whether SDI infringed the 1972 **ABM treaty**.

Reagan claimed that the ‘**window of vulnerability**’ created in the 1970s had to be closed and replaced with a ‘**margin of safety**’. This was used to justify the extraordinary expansion of US arsenal in the early 1980s.

The administration launched a **five-year programme** costing **$180 billion**. Defence spending more than doubled between 1981 and 1986, resulting in the **largest US arms build-up since the 1960s**.

However, Reagan hated the thought of nuclear war and, as later events proved, he was keen to eliminate nuclear weapons in conjunction with Gorbachev. Nevertheless, high-profile programmes such as the **MX missile** and the **B-1 bomber** were restored, and the **Stealth bomber**, invisible to radar, was pushed ahead.

Reagan hoped to weaken the USSR by providing US support to anti-communist ‘**freedom fighters**’, such as the **Mujahedeen** in Afghanistan. The assertion of the ‘universal right of all human beings’ to ‘freedom’ became known as the **Reagan Doctrine**.

He believed that previous presidents had failed to convince the US public of the need for an ongoing battle against communism. For him, the Cold War was a **moral mission** which required **public support**, which had waned since failure in Vietnam.

The Reagan Doctrine decreased the **financial resources** and the **political legitimacy** of the USSR. The war in Afghanistan **drained Soviet resources**, **weakened support** in the USSR for their government, and weakened support from the **international community**.

Reagan ruled out **direct US military intervention** but he gave substantial aid through the **CIA** in both money and military equipment. Small-scale CIA activities went on in **Ethiopia**, **Angola** and **Cambodia**.

The Reagan administration was worried by the spread of Cuban and Soviet influence in **El Salvador** and **Nicaragua** and therefore sent substantial aid to the ‘democratic’ government in the former, which turned El Salvador into a war-torn, decimated country beset with assassinations.
In Nicaragua, the US wanted to overthrow the Sandinistas by using economic pressure and supporting ‘freedom fighters’, the Contras. Congress restricted funding for the Contras, so Reagan resorted to covert methods of gaining funding, including the secret sale of arms to Iran (the 1986 Iran-Contra Scandal). The Sandinistas remained in office until 1990 when they lost national elections.

In 1983, the US intervened directly in Grenada, in order to prevent the island from becoming a ‘Soviet-Cuban colony’ which would be a ‘threat to democracy’.

Hard-line rhetoric included Reagan’s 1983 ‘Evil Empire’ speech. He also publically discussed the US revised policy on nuclear war against the Soviets, where he claimed that the US was prepared for a ‘limited nuclear war in Europe’ (a first strike against the Soviets).

Reagan’s diplomacy weakened the Soviet position. He won domestic support for increased spending on defence, giving the US the edge in the arms race.

Diplomatically, the US returned to the idea of ‘linkage’. For example, if the USSR wanted proper talks they would have to withdraw from Afghanistan. But Reagan’s confrontational attitude did not translate into confrontational policy. In 1982, George Schultz, Secretary of State, called for arms control negotiations.

In November 1981, Reagan began talks on European security with the Soviets in Geneva. These talks were about intermediate range missiles in Europe. The US surprised the Soviets by proposing the ‘zero option’; this was rejected by Gromyko who called it ‘unilateral disarmament’.

Similar suspicious feelings surround the May 1982 proposal to resume the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START). The change in name from SALT caused problems; the Soviets saw ‘reductions’ as an attempt by the US to gain a strategic advantage.

START began at Geneva in June 1982 but little progress was made. Talks were suspended in December 1983. 1983 was the nadir in relations since the Cuban Missile Crisis. The START talks broke down, SDI was announced, and Cruise and Pershing missiles were deployed.

The negative attitudes shown by the USSR in arms talks reflected Soviet unhappiness at Reagan’s determination to ‘negotiate from a position of strength’.
Reagan had a similar view of the USSR to Margaret Thatcher. They both believed that it was the duty of the West to stand up to the ‘Evil Empire’. Also, they were committed to expanding government spending on defence (in particular the Trident nuclear missiles), and by ‘rolling back the state’, they were combating communist aspects of Western culture.

Thatcher, Prime Minister and notorious witch, was a strong opponent of communism and a big supporter of free market economics, in particular ‘monetarism’. She won the Falklands War in 1982 and was Reagan’s voice in Western Europe.

The triumphalists claim that Thatcher had an important role. She supported Reagan’s policy of ‘militarised counter-revolution’ and reinforced his rhetoric. In October 1982, she remarked that the Soviet ‘pitiless ideology only survives because it is maintained by force’. From November 1983, Thatcher allowed the US to deploy Cruise missiles in Britain.

However, the ‘Iron Lady’ invited Gorbachev to London in 1984, before he came to power, and established a good working relationship with him. She urged Reagan to enter talks with Gorbachev, and also endorsed his policy of Perestroika. In effect, Thatcher was little more than a sideshow.

Mikhail Gorbachev

Gorbachev was the youngest member of the Politburo in 1980 and became General Secretary of the Party in 1985 and leader of the USSR from 1985 until its collapse in 1991.

He was a communist who believed the system needed reform to benefit the Soviet people. He wanted to end the arms race so that the economy could focus on reform and standards of living. He pursued policies of ‘Glasnost’ (openness and greater freedom), ‘Perestroika’ (restructuring of the economy), ‘Demokratizatsiya’ (democratic elements in government) and ‘Uskoreniye’ (a speed-up of economic development).

Gorbachev realised that internal reform meant cutting back on the massive share of the Soviet GNP being given to military purposes. This meant reducing the risk of war by seeking better relations with the West and the US and abandoning the arms race.