

## A Strong Approach to Communism

During the first term of his presidency, Ronald Reagan challenged the Soviet Union by building up America's military and casting the Cold War as a struggle between good and evil:

“But if history teaches anything, it teaches that simpliminded appeasement or wishful thinking about our adversaries is folly. . . . I urge you to speak against those who would place the United States in a position of military and moral inferiority . . . beware the temptation . . . to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.”

—President Ronald Reagan, March 8, 1983

▲ A soldier trains at Fort Dix in New Jersey in the 1980s.

# The End of the Cold War

## Objectives

- Analyze the ways that Ronald Reagan challenged communism and the Soviet Union.
- Explain why communism collapsed in Europe and in the Soviet Union.
- Describe other foreign policy challenges that faced the United States in the 1980s.

## Terms and People

Strategic Defense Initiative

Contras

Mikhail Gorbachev

*glasnost*

*perestroika*

Iran-Contra affair

**Why It Matters** President Ronald Reagan believed that the United States had lost its way in the wake of the Vietnam War. Rather than détente, he felt the United States should seek to roll back Soviet rule in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Reagan believed that peace would come through strength. Although they initially increased tensions between the two superpowers, Reagan's foreign policies contributed to the end of the Cold War. **Section Focus Question:** What were Reagan's foreign policies, and how did they contribute to the fall of communism in Europe?

## Reagan Challenges Communism

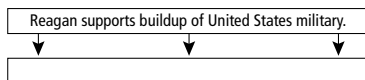
President Reagan believed that the United States needed to weaken communism by challenging it as much as possible without provoking war. To this end, he devised policies aimed at toppling communist nations, ranging from building new nuclear missile systems to funding covert operations against Soviet troops and allies around the globe.

**Reagan Builds Up the U.S. Military** Under Reagan, the United States committed itself to the largest peacetime military buildup in its history. Reagan dedicated billions of dollars to the development and production of B-1 and B-2 bombers, MX missile systems, and other projects. In spite of massive protests by the nuclear freeze movement in the United States and abroad, the Reagan administration placed a new generation of nuclear missiles in Europe.

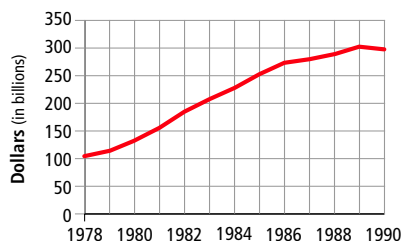
Reagan supported this massive military buildup, in part, because he did not believe that the Soviet Union could afford to spend as much on defense as the United States could. Reagan felt this

## NoteTaking

**Reading Skill: Sequence** As you read this section, use a flowchart like the one below to sequence major events related to the fall of communism in Europe and the Soviet Union.



## Federal Defense Spending, 1978–1990



SOURCE: Statistical Abstract of the United States

**Graph Skills** Reagan's foreign policy stance caused defense spending to increase dramatically. *How much did defense spending increase between 1978 and 1988?*

## The Contras in Nicaragua

After coming to power in 1939, Nicaragua's socialist Sandinista government accepted aid from Cuba and the Soviet Union, alarming the United States. Below, a group of Contras review a map at a base camp along the San Juan River. Contras opposed the Sandinista government. *How did a socialist government in Nicaragua alarm foreign policy officials in the United States?*



applied particularly to the **Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)**, a proposed program in which land- and space-based lasers would destroy any missiles aimed at the United States before they could reach their targets. Some dubbed the missile program "Star Wars," after the popular science-fiction movie trilogy, and claimed that it was unrealistic.

**Reagan Aids Anticommunists** Reagan also sought to weaken the Soviet Union by supporting anticommunist rebellions around the globe. To this end, the United States funded and trained the mujahadeen (moo jah huh DEEN), anti-Soviet rebels in Afghanistan. Reagan's advisers believed that with U.S. help, these guerrillas could drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan. In 1988, Soviet forces finally began to withdraw after years of fierce Afghan resistance.

Closer to home, Secretary of State Alexander Haig feared that the newly formed Sandinista government in Nicaragua provided the Soviets with a "safe house" in America's backyard. To counter this threat, the administration backed a group of anticommunist counterrevolutionaries, known as the **Contras**. At the same time, the United States supported a right-wing government in El Salvador as it battled leftist rebels. Many human rights activists strongly objected to this policy; even U.S. Ambassador Robert White described the legal system in El Salvador as "rotten" and called for the United States to suspend aid to the nation. Instead, Congress made funding for El Salvador's government dependent on the nation making progress on human rights.

In 1983, Reagan acted to counter another perceived threat in the Western Hemisphere. Members of a radical leftist movement, with some help from Cuba, had violently ousted the Grenadian prime minister. On October 25, 1983, U.S. troops invaded Grenada to prevent the island nation from becoming a communist outpost and to protect the lives of American medical students. Even though the legal grounds for this invasion proved questionable, most Americans approved of Reagan's decision.

**Gorbachev Pursues Reform** In 1985, **Mikhail Gorbachev** (mee kah EEL GOR buh chawf) became the President of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev ushered in a new Soviet era by pursuing the twin policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. *Glasnost* meant "a new openness," and *perestroika* stood for reforming the Soviet system—for instance, by moving away from a socialist or state-controlled economy. Gorbachev's reforms created an opening for a shift in relations between the two superpowers.


Gorbachev started these reforms mostly because the Soviet Union's economy lay in shambles. The nation faced regular shortages of food. Its factories and workers could not compete with their Western counterparts. A huge chunk of the Soviet economy's money went toward paying for the military. The war in Afghanistan had drained Soviet resources. Gorbachev realized that his nation could not match the military buildup initiated by the Reagan administration.

**The Two Leaders Meet** Gorbachev's policies and personality helped soften the Soviet Union's international image. Reagan responded to this change by moderating his own stance toward the Soviet Union. While the two nations had held no summits during Reagan's first four years in office, their leaders met four times between 1985 and 1989. During their final meeting in Moscow, Reagan and Gorbachev toasted each other at a state dinner, toured the sights like old friends, and held a joint press conference. At the press conference, a reporter asked Reagan about his description of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." Reagan responded, "I was talking about another era." Then, Gorbachev allowed President Reagan to address students at Moscow State University on the benefits of the free-enterprise system and democracy:

**Primary Source** "Your generation is living in one of the most exciting times in Soviet history. It is a time when the first breath of freedom stirs the air and the heart beats to the accelerated rhythm of hope, when the accumulated spiritual energies of a long silence yearn to break free. . . . We do not know what the conclusion of this journey will be, but we're hopeful that the promise of reform will be fulfilled . . . leading to a new world of reconciliation, friendship, and peace."

—Ronald Reagan, May 31, 1988

Even before this summit, the two nations had signed a historic nuclear arms pact and had begun negotiations on the START I Treaty, which would reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world.

 **Checkpoint** What policies toward communism did President Reagan pursue?



### Analyzing Political Cartoons

**A Bumpy Ride?** In this cartoon, the communist bloc, or the group of Soviet-dominated communist nations in Eastern Europe, is represented by a rickety car headed down the bumpy road of reform.

1. What does the cartoonist seem to think perestroika will do to the communist bloc?
2. Why might economic reforms like perestroika lead to bumpy, or troubled, times?

## The Cold War Ends

In a little over three years' time after Reagan's speech in Moscow, the Cold War had come to an end. The Berlin Wall came down; Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary held democratic elections; and the Soviet Union disintegrated into numerous separate republics. *Time* magazine observed: "It was one of those rare times when the tectonic plates of history shift beneath men's feet, and nothing after is quite the same."

**Communism Ends in Eastern Europe** More so than any other event, the fall of the Berlin Wall symbolized the end of communism in Europe. For decades, the wall had blocked travel from communist East Berlin to democratic West Berlin. Guards shot those who attempted to escape over the wall to West Berlin. Then, in November 1989, following the fall of East Germany's communist government, East German authorities opened the wall's gates. Thousands climbed atop the wall; some even took sledgehammers and chipped away at the barricade. Within a year, East and West Germany would reunite as one single nation. Communists also lost power in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania in 1989; in Albania in 1990; and in Yugoslavia in 1991.



▲ America's buildup of weapons, such as long-range nuclear missiles, threatens the Soviet Union.

**The Soviet Union Breaks Apart** In August 1991, hard-liners in the Soviet Union attempted to stage a coup in a last-gasp attempt to maintain communist rule. But when millions of Russians, led by Boris Yeltsin, rallied in the streets of Moscow in support of Gorbachev, the coup fell apart. Not long afterward, the Communist Party lost power, and the Soviet Union separated into 15 independent republics. Boris Yeltsin became the new leader of the largest new republic, the Russian Federation.

Historians do not totally agree on what caused the Soviet Union to collapse. Most acknowledge that Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* opened the floodgates to rebellions against Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. Likewise, they note that his policy of *perestroika* fostered a challenge to communist rule within the Soviet Union. Yet, a number of scholars give Reagan credit for bringing an end

## Events That Changed America

### THE FALL OF COMMUNISM IN EUROPE

In the early 1980s, Ronald Reagan began to build up the American military. Knowing that the struggling Soviet economy could not match this buildup, Mikhail Gorbachev began reforms in the Soviet Union and sought a better relationship with the United States.

Then came 1989, the "year of the miracle." In that year, the nations of Eastern Europe experienced a series of bloodless revolutions. In June 1989, Solidarity, Poland's anticommunist reform party, swept into power. Its leader, Lech Walesa, was elected President in 1990. In November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. People were allowed to travel freely from East to West Berlin for the first time in nearly 40 years. Next, massive demonstrations by university students in Czechoslovakia ended communist rule there. Finally, in August 1991, following a failed coup against Gorbachev, millions of Russians led by Boris Yeltsin protested against the central Soviet government, breaking its power. Not long afterward, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. President George H.W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin, the President of the new Russian Federation, established a friendly relationship between their nations.

▲ An American game about the Soviet policy of *glasnost*

▼ Reagan shares a friendly moment with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.



Lech Walesa, head of Poland's Solidarity movement, kisses the Polish flag as he takes his oath as President. ▼





to the Cold War. By dedicating America to a massive arms buildup, they argue, he hastened the collapse of the Soviet economy. In turn, this compelled Gorbachev to promote reform at home and relinquish control of Eastern Europe.

The key rival, competitor, and enemy of the United States for so many years had suddenly disappeared. President George H.W. Bush met and signed agreements with first Gorbachev and then Yeltsin to scale down and even eliminate certain types of nuclear weapons. Bush and Yeltsin issued a joint statement in 1992 pledging friendship and cooperation. The long Cold War, which had absorbed so much of the energy and resources of the Soviet Union and the United States since 1945, was finally over.

✓ **Checkpoint** What key actions and events brought about the end of the Cold War?



### Why It Matters

Although communism survived in China, Cuba, and a few other nations, the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union ended the Cold War. American leaders now faced new challenges and daunting questions: Should military spending be decreased? What new direction should American foreign policy take in the post-Cold War world?

◀ West Germans celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Berlin.

▲ Bush and Yeltsin meet at Camp David to discuss joint foreign-policy proposals.

◀ Thousands of Czechs hold peaceful protests and candlelight vigils to protest Czechoslovakia's communist regime.

A child plays on a statue of Stalin that has been knocked down in Gorky Park in Moscow. ▼



### Thinking Critically

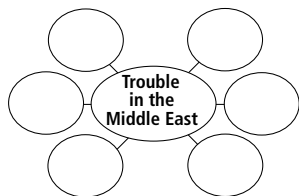
How did Reagan end up influencing Soviet policy in the mid-1980s?

### History Interactive

For: More images from the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union  
Web Code: nep-1904

## NoteTaking

**Identify Main Ideas** Record the main ideas related to events in the Middle East during Reagan's presidency in a concept web like the one below.



## Vocabulary Builder

**contradict**—(kahn truh DIHKT) *v.*  
to go against

## Trouble Persists in the Middle East

Even as the Soviet Union collapsed, the United States continued to confront problems in the Middle East. In 1982, Reagan sent a group of 800 United States Marines to Lebanon as part of an international force trying to bring peace to a nation torn by civil war. On October 23, 1983, a truck loaded with thousands of pounds of explosives smashed through barriers at the headquarters of the United States Marines in Beirut (bay ROOT), Lebanon's capital, and into a four-story building that housed hundreds of military personnel. The explosion killed 241 marines. Reagan withdrew the remaining marines in February 1984. The incident illustrated, once again, the complicated nature of Middle Eastern politics.

During the 1980s, the United States often clashed with Libya. Led by Muammar al-Qaddafi (MOO uh mahr al kuh DAH fee), whom Reagan described as "the mad dog of the Middle East," Libya supported terrorist groups. In 1986, following a terrorist attack on a Berlin nightclub, which Reagan blamed on Qaddafi, U.S. warplanes bombed Libya. The air raid killed one of Qaddafi's daughters. Even though Qaddafi was unharmed, his criticism of the United States dwindled.

Reagan's presidency had started with a breakthrough in the Middle East. Twenty minutes after he took the oath of office on January 20, 1981, Iran released all 52 Americans it had held hostage since 1979. But during his second term, the Iran-Contra affair badly tarnished Reagan's reputation.

The **Iran-Contra affair** began when the United States sold weapons to Iran in 1985 in exchange for Iran's promise to pressure terrorist groups in Lebanon to release some American hostages. The plan didn't work, and it contradicted the administration's policy of refusing to negotiate with terrorists. Then, the administration used the money from the sale to fund the Contras in Nicaragua, despite the fact that in 1983 Congress had banned sending funds to the Contras. News of these deals came out in 1986. Although President Reagan accepted responsibility for the actions of his administration, he never admitted to ordering his aides to support the Contras. Ultimately, several leading administration officials and a top aide, Oliver North, were convicted on charges stemming from the scandal, although many of the convictions were later overturned on technical grounds. In spite of this, Reagan left office with extremely high approval ratings.



**Checkpoint** What was the Iran-Contra scandal?

SECTION

# 3 Assessment

## Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: nea-1905

### Comprehension

- 1. Terms and People** For each item below, write a sentence explaining how the term or person related to the fall of communism in Europe and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

- Strategic Defense Initiative
- Mikhail Gorbachev
- *glasnost*
- *perestroika*

### 2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

**Sequence** Use your flowchart to answer the Section Focus Question: What were Reagan's foreign policies, and how did they contribute to the fall of communism in Europe?

### Writing About History

- 3. Quick Write: Choose Images** Using library books or approved Internet sources, select images and write captions to create a multimedia presentation about the fall of the Berlin Wall.

### Critical Thinking

- 4. Draw Inferences** How did Reagan's foreign policy differ from that of Carter?
- 5. Identify Point of View** During his first term, Reagan called the Soviet Union an "evil empire," but in his second term, he developed a working relationship with Gorbachev. What accounts for this change in strategy?
- 6. Synthesize Information** Why did Reagan order an air raid on Libya?