THE BREZHNEV DOCTRINE

Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, stated that it was the duty of any communist country to intervene with force in any other communist country which was threatened by capitalism. This applied even to independent countries. This policy became known as the Brezhnev Doctrine.

In practice, it meant that the USSR would stop any country in the Warsaw Pact which tried to go its own way. Soviet troops had succeeded in controlling Hungary in 1956. Afterwards, Hungarian living standards had gone up and its leaders seemed popular. The Czech invasion of 1968 tried to repeat this success. It seemed as if Soviet policy had changed little in 12 years. Resistance would still be crushed.

However, the invasion of Czechoslavakia marked a turning-point in the Cold War, though few people knew it at the time. What happened in Hungary was not repeated in Czechoslavakia. The Czech people never really trusted those who replaced Dubcek. And the Brezhnev Doctrine was almost an admission that countries would only stay communist if the USSR forced them to do so.

REASONS FOR DÉTENTE

The Czech crisis had occurred when East-West relations were improving. From 1964 onwards, politicians talked about détente between East and West. Détente means a relaxing of tension.

At first, it seemed as though events in Czechoslavakia would put an end to détente. Many countries felt that they needed to strengthen their defences against a possible Soviet attack. For instance, President Tito increased the Yugoslav armed forces.

However, there were good reasons why détente continued. The Cuban Missiles Crisis had shown just how dangerous a confrontation could be. Neither side wanted the next disagreement to turn into a nuclear war. Each side already had enough nuclear weapons to destroy the other. Better relations meant that fewer weapons needed to be built. This not only saved money, it allowed western and eastern leaders to portray themselves as peace-makers.

Both the USA and USSR wanted détente because each had economic problems during the 1970s. In the USA, there was rising inflation. Money spent on nuclear weapons meant there was less available to improve living conditions for poor Americans.

The USSR, too, faced problems. It was spending 20 per cent of its budget on defence. Also, its industry was very inefficient compared with American industry. Soviet industry had to improve before its leaders could raise people's standard of living.

Also, the USSR's reputation among other communists was damaged by its treatment of Czechoslavakia. The Romanian leader made a speech, attacking the Soviet action. President Tito of Yugoslavia also condemned it. So did the Chinese. There was criticism from communist parties in Britain, France, Italy and Spain.

Lastly, there were political reasons for détente. The USSR had begun to quarrel with communist China, her huge neighbour to the south. Meanwhile, the Americans had become bogged down in the Vietnam War.

So, throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, American and Soviet leaders tried hard to reduce tension. This led to better trade links between the two superpowers after 1972. In particular, the USA sold its surplus wheat cheaply to the USSR. However, the biggest benefits of détente were agreements to limit missiles.

SALT I

Richard Nixon became US President in 1969. Both he and Brezhnev wished to improve relations between the USA and USSR. In 1969, they made the first real attempt to limit weapons when they began the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). These talks concerned with expensive middle-range nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, Nixon tried to improve relations with China. In 1971, he agreed to let China join the UN. In February 1972, he visited the Chinese capital, Beijing. Soviet leaders became worried that the USA and China might ally against the USSR.

In May 1972, Nixon visited the Soviet Union. He was the first American president to go there since Roosevelt went to Yalta in 1945. In Moscow, the two superpowers signed the SALT I treaty. They agreed to limit building certain missiles for five years. However, this agreement did not reduce existing stocks of weapons.

In effect, western leaders accepted that the USSR would continue to rule over communist eastern Europe. Soviet leaders were delighted with this. In return, they made half-hearted promises about civil rights which they did not intend to keep. While the talks went on, new Soviet medium-range missiles were secretly being put in position. They were aimed at western Europe.

WAS COMMUNISM WINNING?

The mid-1970s were the high point of détente. But the USSR's real aim had not changed: it wanted to defeat capitalism and to turn the whole world communist. Soviet leaders believed they were succeeding.

The USA's defeat in Vietnam was just one sign that capitalism seemed to be losing. Cambodia and Laos, as well as Vietnam, turned communist. In Africa, too, support for communism was growing.

SALT II

Despite SALT I, the number of Soviet and American missiles increased during the 1970s. A later American President, Jimmy Carter (1977–81), persuaded both sides to get rid of nuclear weapons completely and more SALT talks were held.

A new SALT agreement was signed by Presidents Carter and Brezhnev in June 1979. This limited the number of long-range missiles, especially those with multiple warheads. But, in December, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan. The SALT talks stopped abruptly and the US Congress refused to ratify the SALT II agreement. Détente was now under threat.

Questions

a. Explain what is meant by 'détente'. (3 marks)
b. Describe the key features of SALT I and SALT II. (5 marks)
c. Describe the key features of the Helsinki Agreement, 1975. (5 marks)

Explain how successful the moves towards détente were in the 1970s. Write a few sentences under each of the following headings:

- The Czech crisis
- The Cuban Missile Crisis
- Economic problems
- Political reasons
- SALT I and II.
AFGHANISTAN

In fact, Soviet troops were already in Afghanistan. The airport at Kabul, Afghanistan’s capital, had been captured on Christmas Eve, to allow the USSR to bring in troops and equipment. At the same time, Soviet troops had crossed the northern border into Afghanistan.

A KGB squad attacked the palace in Kabul and assassinated the communist president, Hazizullah Amin. On New Year’s Day 1980, a new government was set up in Kabul, led by Babrak Karmal. He was a former Afghan leader who had been in exile in the USSR. A Soviet plane had flown him back specially to take over the government.

Islamic Revolt

Criticism of the invasion was worldwide. Afghanistan’s Muslim neighbours, Pakistan and Iran, both objected. So did western powers. The USA boycotted the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow as a protest. That same year, Ronald Reagan was elected as the next US President after demanding that the United States build more nuclear weapons.

The USSR ignored the protests and its troops stayed. By February 1980, there were 80,000 of them. However, they soon found that putting down opposition in Afghanistan wasn’t as easy as in Hungary or Czechoslovakia.

Soviet troops were supposed to support the Afghan army against the Muslim groups which were anti-communist. But they faced two problems. First, the Afghan army was not as good as they had believed. Second, they faced opposition from rebel forces, called the mujaheddin.

The rebels were not just fighting to get rid of Soviet troops. They were fighting to turn Afghanistan into a Muslim country. They were well-equipped because they were given weapons by both the USA and China, who opposed the Soviet invasion.

13 SOVIET WITHDRAWAL

The mujaheddin fought a guerrilla war against the Soviet and Afghan armies. Soviet troops controlled the towns where they were based but the mujaheddin controlled the countryside. They attacked Soviet supply routes; they shot at Soviet transport planes. Other nations increased their pressure on the Soviet Union. The USA, for instance, banned grain exports to the USSR. In 1981, the UN General Assembly asked the USSR to leave Afghanistan: the request was ignored.

In addition to this, the USSR faced problems at home. Muslim nations, which had once been friendly, turned hostile. The USSR increasingly became worried that Muslims inside the Soviet Union might revolt. In any case, the war grew unpopular as Soviet casualties increased (see Source A).

In 1985, a new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, decided to withdraw from Afghanistan. Agreement was reached in Geneva in 1988 and the last Soviet soldiers left Afghanistan in February 1989. Over 20,000 Soviet troops had died in ten years of fighting. Under Gorbachev, the media could report the war honestly (see Sources B and C).

The consequences were far greater for Afghanistan itself. About a million Afghans may have died – and the fighting went on even after the Soviet departure. By 1989, almost half the original Afghan population had become refugees. Those who were left could no longer grow enough food because the war had destroyed so much farmland.

Key Issue

- How did Afghanistan contribute to the collapse of detente in the late 1970s and early 1980s?

A Source

One Russian mother tried to discover how her soldier son died. She was told the following.

You cannot walk around saying that your son has been killed in Afghanistan. That’s classified (secret) information.

B Source

Aless Adamovich, writing in Moscow News, a Russian newspaper (1990). The Afghan people lost a million lives in a war which we had no right to get involved in. We couldn’t defeat the Afghan ‘bandits’ because they were fighting us as invaders.

C Source

One Soviet soldier who fought in Afghanistan said the following afterwards.

We were given medals which we don’t wear. When the time comes we’ll return them. Those medals [were] received honestly in a dishonest war.

Question

Why did relations between the USA and the USSR worsen following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan? (17 marks)
THE NEW COLD WAR

**Key Issue**

Why did détente collapse in the early 1980s?

**DÉTENTE UNDER THREAT**

In 1980, America elected Ronald Reagan as its new president. Reagan was fiercely anti-communist and this quickly led to a further deterioration in relations between the Soviet Union and the United States. However, the situation of détente between the two superpowers was already under threat before Reagan took over the presidency in 1981.

**AFRICA**

From the mid-1970s, the civil war in the former Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique provided the Soviet Union with an opportunity to extend its influence into new regions of Africa. Angola became the focus of Cold War attention because of its oil resources. The Russians provided weapons and 50,000 Cuban troops to the Marxist MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) faction while South Africa, America and America backed the anti-communist forces. The civil war continued into the 1990s despite the end of the Cold War.

**CENTRAL AMERICA**

In 1978, Soviet influence also extended into Central America. The Sandinistas, a Marxist guerrilla group,

attacked and overthrew the pro-US government in Nicaragua. Soviet influence in Central America was of even more concern to the United States because it was that much closer to them.

**THE 'EVIL EMPIRE'**

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 brought an end to a decade which saw several setbacks for the United States. President Carter's responses to these were considered too soft by Reagan. Carter had refused to sell the American grain to the Russians and had boycotted the 1980 Olympic games held in Moscow. Reagan was determined to turn events America's way more decisively as the new Cold War gathered pace.

Reagan made clear his determination to confront the Soviet Union by approving the development of the neutron bomb. The neutron bomb killed people but did not destroy buildings. He also announced a $32 billion increase in the defence budget and decided to deploy Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe. These were intermediate-range missiles which could not be spotted by enemy radar. For good measure, just in case the Soviets had not got the message, Reagan called the USSR the 'evil empire'. These developments all seemed to make a war that little bit more likely.

Despite this, the USA and the USSR began new arms talks in Geneva in July 1982. These were called START (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks). The two sides discussed limiting intermediate nuclear weapons in Europe.

**STRATEGIC DEFENCE INITIATIVE**

However, Reagan continued to keep the pressure on the Soviet Union. In 1983, he announced the beginning of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI). The plan was to build a laser shield around the United States which would have made it impossible for Soviet missiles to hit American targets. People nicknamed it 'Star Wars'. Star Wars was controversial because it suggested that the US no longer accepted the principle of MAD. Reagan seemed to be suggesting that the United States could wage a nuclear war and survive.

In fact, the United States did not have the technology to make Star Wars a real possibility, but the Soviet Union did not know this and was greatly worried. The Soviet delegation walked out of the START negotiations in protest. The options facing the USSR were not encouraging. They knew they did not have the technology to match the SDI project and neither did they have the funds to pay for the research. Their only choice was to come to terms with Reagan.

**ENTER GORBACHEV**

Fortunately, from 1985 the Russians had a new leader who was willing to face this fact head on. Mikhail Gorbachev knew that the future of the communist system and the Soviet Union depended on its ability to deliver a higher standard of living to its people. It could not afford to spend huge sums of money on the military in order to compete with the United States. Gorbachev's Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, later calculated that as much as 50% of the Soviet Union's national income was spent on defence, arms and the armed forces. At the same time, the United States was spending just 6%.

**Questions**

1. **A SOURCE**

A British cartoon of 1978. Soviet planes had attacked a Korean airliner which strayed into Russian airspace.

2. **ENTER GORBACHEV**

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3. **Questions**

a. Study Source A. Explain the message of this cartoon, which shows Brezhnev riding on a dove, the symbol of peace. Support your answer by referring to details of the cartoon and your own knowledge. (6 marks)

b. Explain why the process of détente had come to an end by 1981. (9 marks)