

What were the major factors that led to the end of the Cold War?

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Churchill said that “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.” He was referring to the Cold War between Western capitalist countries led by the United States and the Soviet-led socialist countries. “Cold War” means no direct engagement but opposition in economic, political, military, diplomatic, cultural, and ideological areas, because there are a lot of differences between Capitalism and Socialism. The Cold War lasted for forty-four years from 1947 to 1991. There are many famous leaders from this time period like Gorbachev and Reagan. They had major influence on events leading to the end of Cold War. What were the major causes that led to the end of the Cold War?

1. The political and economic were transformations led by Ronald Wilson Reagan in the United States.
2. The reforms led by Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.
3. The unification of West Germany and East Germany.

At the time near to the end of the Cold War. Ronald Wilson Reagan was the 40th President of the United States (1981–1989). Many view him as one of the greatest presidents of the United States. “The incoming Reagan Administration defined its mandate for change as a mandate to turn the country around, toward a better America that had existed sometime before. The Reagan Revolution was to be a restoration” (Simons,1990, p.30). The Reagan Administration brought a lot of change for America in the political and economic spectrum. According to Simons, Reagan asked himself to “turn the country around” and make the country more powerful. He really did it, and people called it “Reagan Revolution”. He reduced inflation, decreased the interest rates, expanded military expenditure, and dropped

the control of commercial activity. The most important measure he took near the end of the Cold War was expanding military expenditure. At the beginning of the Cold War, the Soviet Union was ahead of America in the arms race, but the measure of expanding military expenditure made America catch up with the Soviet Union in the arms race. This action put a lot of pressure on the Soviet because in the preceding thirty years, they had the superiority in the armament category. Reagan changed this situation, and this led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Many people have raised the question: where did the Reagan Administration get the money to increase the size of army? It is not strange that this question existed, because when Reagan took power, he reduced the tax rate. It is common sense that the income of the government comes from the taxes. Actually, the Reagan government earned more money from tax, because the Reagan Revolution emphasized the freedom of economics. And after the recession during 1981 to 1982, the American economy began a dramatic recovery, which was maintained for several years. It was the longest economic expansion, and even though the Reagan government dropped the tax rate, the money of business owners was hugely increasing, so the government still made a lot of money. And these measures provided the financial support for the arms race. And “The speech does allude to economic troubles in the Soviet Union that perhaps were not fully recognized at the time, but most experts in the West by 1982 were well aware that both the Soviet economy and its political coherence were in decline”(Gaffney, 2011,). At the same time, the Soviet economy was slipping down; this meant America gradually had the advantages in the Cold War, and the end of the Cold War was coming.

In contrast with Reagan, who sought to improve the power of his country to end the Cold War, there was also a president of the Soviet Union, who decreased the power of his

country to end the Cold War. His name was Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev. He served as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1985 until 1991, and as the last head of state of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev made a direct contribution to end the Cold War. Batayuk in his book, *The End of the Cold War*, writes,

“And Mikhail Gorbachev, who proclaimed the primacy of ‘values common to all mankind’ over the ‘class struggle’, was merely following in the footsteps of his predecessors, who had gradually rid themselves of the revolutionary features of Communist ideology. The weakening of that revolutionary appeal had led to the deep transformation of Soviet foreign policy, thus paving the way for the end of the Cold War”(1999,)

This could seem like the response to the Reagan Revolution. As he “proclaimed the primacy of ‘values common to all mankind’ over the ‘class struggle’”, Gorbachev began the process of democratization, and because of this, the Soviet lost the control of other states. “At first, Gorbachev had wanted to democratize the Party but he was unable to overcome fierce opposition in the party apparatus. He, therefore, switched his attention to the state” (Bowker, p.19). He changed his mind in regard to the state, but he gave more power to the states, because he carried out the process of democratization. And he initiated the reforms too quickly so that the political policy and economics could not fit.

And in the arms race, Gorbachev was the first leader of the Soviet Union who did not mainly develop armament, because he often appeared as a president who advocated decreasing the armament. That is the reason that he received the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize. Reducing the armament also facilitated the end of the Cold War because this led America to completely suppressing the Soviet Union in the arms race. Gorbachev and Reagan had totally different ideas about the arms race. Reagan advocated the Strategic Defense Initiative which

was the Star Wars Program, but Gorbachev opposed this program. Even Gorbachev had a positive attitude toward the dialogue between America and the Soviet Union. The fact that the Soviet Union did not have advantages in the Cold War was unchangeable.

The mark of the end of the Cold War was that the collapse of the Soviet Union. “The unraveling of the Soviet Bloc began in Poland in June 1989” (Ushistory.org, 2012,). Soon, the storm of freedom swept across Germany. “Here, crews of German troops tear down the Berlin Wall. While many had taken axes and picks to the Wall upon the collapse of Communism in Germany in 1989, the official destruction of the Berlin Wall did not begin until June, 1990”(Ushistory.org, 2012,). The Berlin Wall was dinged down after the transformation of Poland. Then, West Germany and East Germany were unified.

At first, the Western scholars thought that the Berlin Wall was used to prevent East Germany escaping into West Berlin. It was built by East Germany, and they called it “anti-fascist defense wall”. The Berlin Wall separated Germany: West Germany belonged to Western capitalist countries, and East Germany belonged to the Soviet-led socialist countries. So, it looked like a smaller version of the Cold War. Those who tried to escape risked being killed by the guard set on the observation tower. The most interesting thing is that there were so many East Germans who still tried to escape to West Germany by jumping, swimming, making homemade submarines, creating tunnels, and even using fire balloons. The truth was that almost half of these fugitives were arrested, and some of them were killed. West Germany had the advanced technology. On the other hand, East Germany only had a labor jobs; this is the reason why many people from East Germany tried to escape to West Germany.

On November 19, 1989, the new East German government began a plan to ease the travel restrictions on people from East Germany because of the Gorbachev reform.

“Balancing and containing Germany was not the main concern of Gorbachev and Soviet reformers (as it was for the military and the right wing of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union(CPSU)”(Bozo, 2008, p.96). It shows that the Soviet Union could not continue to work under the pressure of the new immigration wave. Under these orders, tens of thousands of people took to the streets, and broke down the Berlin Wall which existed for twenty-eight years, and all of Germany was in an extremely excited state. This event was also called “the collapse of the Berlin Wall”. After this event, the Soviet Union remained unable to return to the days before such things took place. “Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev even signed an agreement that permitted the newly united Germany to remain in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the alliance that had been created to prevent the Soviet conquest of Western Europe”(Matlock, 2001,). The new Germany did not belong to the Soviet Union, and at the same time, the Soviet Union agreed to reduce its conventional forces in Europe. So the Soviet Union lost all of the powerful status that it once owned. And the military competition outside Europe also essentially ended in 1990 after the unification of the Germany.

Looking at the time sequence, the Reagan Revolution, Gorbachev’s reforms and the unification of Germany were connected, and all of these were the major factors that led to the end of the Cold War. When the Cold War ended, this impacted the politics and the economy of the world. Most importantly, it eliminated the tensions in the political, diplomatic, militaristic, and economic arenas. People should realize that the Cold War became a global war and that “whereas the world before 1945 had been wracked by major great power wars, the world system thereafter had been characterized by great power peace” (Cox, 2011,). The two super power countries, the United States and the Soviet Union, accumulated a lot of armament so that they both became afraid to stir up new rounds of war. In some sense, the Cold War really gave the world a long, peaceful time. The major impetus behind the Cold

War was that two powerful countries wanted to contest for world hegemony. So with the end of the Cold War, these two greatly powerful countries should give up to get the world hegemony.

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