

Len Scott (1999): 176-84

wars in others (e.g. Algeria, Malaya, and Angola), depending on the attitudes of the colonial power and the nationalist movements.

- The struggle for independence/national liberation became involved in cold war conflicts when

the superpowers and/or their allies became involved, e.g. Vietnam.

- Whether decolonization was judged successful depends, in part, on whose view you adopt—the European power or the independence movement.

The Cold War

The rise of the United States as a world power after 1945 was of paramount importance in international politics. Its conflict with the Soviet Union provided one of the crucial dynamics in world affairs, and one which affected—directly or indirectly—every part of the globe. In the West, historians have debated, with vigour and acrimony, who was responsible for the collapse of the wartime relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. The rise of the Soviet Union as a global power after 1945 is equally crucial in understanding international affairs in this period. Relations between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and its Eastern European 'allies', with the People's Republic of China (PRC), and with various revolutionary movements and governments in the 'Third World', have been vital issues in world politics, as well as key factors in Soviet-American affairs.

Discerning phases in East-West relations casts light on key characteristics of the cold war. How such phases are defined is a matter of debate. The issue of when the cold war began, for example, is closely bound up with the question of who (if anyone) was responsible. Some historians date the origins of the cold war back to the 'Russian revolution' of 1917, while most focus on various dates between 1945 and 1950. Whether the cold war was inevitable, whether it was the consequence of mistakes and misperceptions by political leaders, or whether it was the response of courageous Western leaders to malign and aggressive Soviet intent, are central issues in debates about the origins of the cold war, and its subsequent development. Hitherto, these debates have drawn from Western archives and sources, and are often focused on Western actions and reactions. With the end of the cold war greater evidence is appearing about Soviet actions, and how Moscow perceived the issues. The following sets out various key phases of the cold war (with which not all historians would agree), but

which helps understand key features and changes in East-West relations after 1945.

1945–1953: Onset of the Cold War

The onset of the cold war in Europe reflected failure to implement the principles agreed at the wartime conferences of Yalta and Potsdam. The future of Germany, and of various Central and Eastern European countries, notably Poland, were issues of growing tension between the former wartime allies. Reconciling the principles of national self-determination with perceptions of national security was a formidable task. In the West there was a growing feeling that Soviet policy toward Eastern Europe was guided not by historic concern with security but by ideological expansion. In March 1947 the Truman administration sought to justify limited aid to Turkey and Greece with a rhetoric designed to arouse awareness of Soviet aims, and a declaration that America would support those threatened by Soviet subversion or expansion. The Truman Doctrine and the associated policy of Containment expressed the self-image of the United States as inherently defensive, and was underpinned by the Marshall Plan for European economic recovery, proclaimed in June 1947, which was essential to the economic rebuilding of Western Europe. In Eastern Europe democratic socialist and other anti-communist forces were systematically undermined and eliminated as Marxist-Leninist regimes loyal to Moscow were installed. The only exception was in Yugoslavia, where the Marxist leader, Marshal Tito, consolidated his position while maintaining independence from Moscow. Subsequently Tito's Yugoslavia was to play an important role in the 'Third World's' Non-Aligned Movement.

The first major confrontation of the cold war took

place over Berlin in 1948. The former German capital had been left deep in the heart of the Soviet zone of occupation, and in June 1948 Stalin sought to resolve its status by severing road and rail communications. The city's population and its political autonomy were kept alive by a massive airlift. Stalin ended the blockade in May 1949. The crisis also saw the deployment of American long-range bombers in Britain, officially described as 'atomic-capable', though none were actually armed with nuclear weapons. The American military deployment was followed by the political commitment enshrined in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) treaty signed in April 1949. The key principle of the treaty was that an attack on one member would be treated as an attack on all. In practice the cornerstone of the alliance was the commitment of the United States to defend Western Europe. In reality, this meant the willingness of the United States to use nuclear weapons to deter Soviet 'aggression'. For the Soviet Union 'political encirclement' soon entailed a growing military, and specifically nuclear, threat.

While the origins of the cold war were in Europe, events and conflicts in Asia and elsewhere, also played a key part. In 1949 the thirty-year long Chinese civil war ended in victory for the communists under Mao Zedong. This had a major impact on Asian affairs and on perceptions in both Moscow and Washington. In 1950 the North Korean attack on South Korea was interpreted as part of a general communist offensive, and a test case for American resolve and the will of the United Nations to withstand aggression. The resulting American and UN commitment, followed in October 1950 by Chinese involvement, led to a war lasting three years and in which over three million people died before pre-war borders were restored. North and South Korea themselves remained locked in seemingly perpetual hostility, even after the end of the cold war.

1953–1969: Conflict, Confrontation, and Compromise

One consequence of the Korean war was the build-up of American conventional forces in Western Europe, in case communist aggression in Asia was a feint to detract from the real intent in Europe. The idea that communism was a monolithic political entity controlled from Moscow became an enduring American fixation, not shared in London and

elsewhere. Western Europeans nevertheless depended on the United States for military security and this dependence deepened as the cold war confrontation in Europe was consolidated. The rearmament of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1954 precipitated the creation of the Warsaw Pact in 1955. The build-up of military forces continued apace, with unprecedented concentrations of conventional and moreover nuclear forces. By the 1960s there were some 7,000 nuclear weapons in Western Europe alone. NATO deployed these nuclear weapons to offset Soviet conventional superiority, while Soviet 'theatre nuclear' forces were to compensate for overall American nuclear superiority. Toward the end of the 1950s the United States also deployed nuclear missiles Europe.

The death of Stalin in 1953 was an important event and had significant consequences for the USSR at home and abroad. Stalin's eventual successor, Nikita Khrushchev, strove to modernize Soviet society, but helped unleash reformist tendencies in Eastern Europe. While Polish reformism was controlled, the position in Hungary threatened Soviet hegemony, and in 1956 Soviet intervention brought bloodshed to the streets of Budapest, and international condemnation on Moscow. This condemnation might well have been greater had not two western democracies, Britain and France, then been involved in attacking Egypt over the Suez canal, much to the consternation of the United States. American economic sanctions effectively curtailed what was seen as the last spasm of British imperialism.

Khrushchev's policy toward the West was a mixture of seeking coexistence while pursuing confrontation. Soviet support for movements of national liberation aroused fears in the West of a global communist challenge and further strengthened American determination to support friends and subvert enemies in the 'Third World'. American commitments to liberal democracy and national self-determination were mediated by cold war perspectives, as well as by perceptions of American economic and political interest. Crises over Berlin in 1961 and Cuba in 1962 marked the most dangerous moments of the cold war. In both there was risk of direct military confrontation, and certainly in October 1962 the possibility of nuclear war. How close the world came to Armageddon in the Cuban missile crisis and exactly why peace was preserved remains a matter of great debate among historians and surviving officials.

Table 4.2. Cold war crises

1948–9	Berlin	USSR/US/UK/France
1954–55	Taiwan straits crisis	US/PRC
1961	Berlin	USSR/US/NATO
1962	Cuba	USSR/US/Cuba
1973	Arab/Israeli war	Egypt/Israel/Syria/US/USSR
1983	Exercise <i>Able Archer</i>	USSR/US/NATO

The events of 1962 were followed by a more stable period of coexistence and competition. Nuclear arsenals continued to grow and both superpowers continued to support friends and subvert enemies. At the same time as America's commitment in Vietnam was deepening, Soviet–Chinese relations were deteriorating. Indeed, by 1969 China and the USSR fought a minor border war over a territorial dispute. Despite these tensions, the foundations for what became known as *détente* were laid between the USSR and USA, and for what became known as *rapprochement* between China and the United States. *Détente* in Europe had its origins in the *ost-politik* of the German Socialist Chancellor, Willy Brandt, and resulted in agreements that recognized the peculiar status of Berlin, and the sovereignty of East Germany. Soviet–American *détente* had its roots in mutual recognition of the need to avoid nuclear crises, and in the economic and military incentives in avoiding an unconstrained arms race.

Both Washington and Moscow also looked toward Beijing in making their 'bilateral' calculations.

1969–1979: The Rise and Fall of *Détente*

The period known as *détente* represented an attempt by both superpowers to manage their relations with each other within a framework of negotiations and agreements. In the West *détente* was associated with the political leadership of President Richard Nixon and his adviser Henry Kissinger, who were also instrumental in Sino–American *rapprochement*. This new phase in Soviet–American relations did not mark an end to political conflict as each side sought to pursue various political goals, some of which were to prove increasingly incompatible with the aspirations of the other superpower. Both sides maintained support for friendly regimes and move-

Table 4.3. Revolutionary upheavals in the 'Third World', 1974–1980

Ethiopia	Overthrow of Haile Selassie	Sept. 1974
Cambodia	Khmer Rouge takes Phnom Penh	April 1975
Vietnam	North Vietnam/Viet Cong take Saigon	April 1975
Laos	Pathet Lao takes over state	May 1975
Guinea-Bissau	Independence from Portugal	Sept. 1974
Mozambique	Independence from Portugal	June 1975
Cape Verde	Independence from Portugal	July 1975
Sao Tome	Independence from Portugal	July 1975
Angola	Independence from Portugal	Nov. 1975
Afghanistan	Military coup in Afghanistan	April 1978
Iran	Ayatollah Khomeini installed in power	Feb. 1979
Grenada	New Jewel Movement takes power	March 1979
Nicaragua	Sandinistas take Managua	July 1979
Zimbabwe	Independence from Britain	April 1980

Source: Halliday (1986: 92).

ments, and this came at a time when various political upheavals were taking place in the 'Third World' (see Table 4.3). How far the superpowers were able to control their friends and how far they were entangled by their commitments was underlined in 1973 when the Arab–Israeli war embroiled both the US and the USSR in what became a potentially dangerous confrontation.

In Washington, Soviet support for revolutionary movements in the 'Third World' was seen as evidence of duplicity. Some Americans claim that Moscow's support for revolutionary forces in Ethiopia in 1975 killed *détente*. Others cite the Soviet role in Angola in 1978. Furthermore, the perception that the USSR was using arms control agreements to gain military advantage was linked to Soviet behaviour in the 'Third World'. Growing Soviet military superiority was reflected in growing Soviet influence, it was argued. The view from Moscow was different, reflecting different assumptions about the scope and purpose of *détente*. Other events were also seen to weaken American influence. The overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979 resulted in the loss of an important western ally in the region, though the militant Islamic government was as hostile to the USSR as to the USA.

December 1979 marked a point of transition in East–West affairs. NATO agreed to deploy land-based Cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe if negotiations with the Soviets did not reduce what NATO saw as a serious imbalance. Later in the month, Soviet armed forces intervened in Afghanistan to support their revolutionary allies. The USSR was bitterly condemned in the West and in the 'Third World' for its actions, and soon became committed to a protracted and bloody struggle which many compared to the American war in Vietnam. In the United States the impact on the Carter administration was to change the President's view of the Soviet Union. In 1980 Ronald Reagan was elected President, aided by criticisms of *détente* and arms control, and committed to a more confrontational approach with the Soviets.

1979–86: 'The Second Cold War'

The resulting period of tension and confrontation between the superpowers has been described as the 'Second Cold War' and compared to the early period of confrontation and tension between 1946

and 1953. In Western Europe and the Soviet Union there was real fear of nuclear war. Much of this was a reaction to the rhetoric and policies of the Reagan administration. American statements on nuclear weapons (see below) and military intervention in Grenada in 1983 and against Libya in 1986 were seen as evidence of a new belligerence. Reagan's policy toward Central America, and support for the rebel *Contras* in Nicaragua, was a source of controversy within the United States and internationally. In 1986 the International Court of Justice found the United States guilty of violating international law for the CIA's covert attacks on Nicaraguan harbours.

The Reagan administration's use of military power was none the less limited, and some operations ended in humiliating failure, notably in the Lebanon in 1983. The rhetoric and the perception, however, were at variance with the reality. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the Soviet leadership took very seriously the words (and deeds) of the Reagan administration and believed that the US leadership was planning a nuclear first strike. In 1983 Soviet air defences shot down a South Korean civilian airliner in Soviet airspace. The American reaction and the imminent deployment of US nuclear missiles in Europe created a climate of great tension in East–West relations. And in November 1983 Soviet intelligence misinterpreted a NATO training exercise (codenamed *Able Archer*) and led the Soviet leadership to believe that NATO was preparing to attack them. How close the world came to a serious nuclear confrontation in 1983 is not yet clear.

Throughout the early 1980s the Soviets were handicapped by a succession of ageing political leaders (Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko) whose ill-health further inhibited Soviet responses to the American challenge and the American threat. This changed dramatically after Mikhail Gorbachev became President in 1985. Gorbachev's 'new thinking' in foreign policy and his domestic reforms created a revolution both in the USSR's foreign relations and within Soviet society. At home the policies of *glasnost* (or openness) and *perestroika* (or restructuring) unleashed nationalist and other forces which, to Gorbachev's dismay, were to destroy the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Gorbachev's aim in foreign policy was to transform relations with the United States and Western Europe. His domestic reforms were also a catalyst for change in Eastern Europe, though, unlike Khrushchev, Gorbachev was not prepared to respond with force or coercion. When confronted

with revolt in Eastern Europe, Gorbachev's foreign ministry declared that countries of Eastern Europe were 'doing it their way' and invoked Frank Sinatra's song 'I did it my way' to mark the end of the Brezhnev doctrine which had limited Eastern European sovereignty and political development. The Sinatra doctrine meant that Eastern Europeans were now allowed to 'do it their way'. Throughout Eastern Europe Moscow-aligned regimes gave way to democracies, in what for the most part was a peaceful as well as speedy transition (see Chapter 5). Most dramatically, Germany became united and East Germany (the German Democratic Republic) disappeared.

Gorbachev's policy toward the West used agreements on nuclear weapons as a means of building trust, and demonstrating the serious and radical nature of his purpose. Despite similar radical agreements on conventional forces in Europe, culminating in the Paris agreement of 1990, the end of the cold war, however, marked success in nuclear arms control but not the beginning of nuclear disarmament.

The histories of the cold war and of the bomb are very closely connected, but while the cold war is now over, nuclear weapons are still very much in existence.

Key Points

- There are disagreements about when the cold war started, why, and who was responsible.
- The cold war began in Europe with the failure to implement the agreements reached at Potsdam and Yalta.
- Distinct phases can be seen in East–West relations during which tension and the risk of direct confrontation grew and receded.
- Some civil and regional wars were intensified and prolonged by superpower involvement; others may have been prevented or shortened.
- The end of the cold war has not resulted in the abolition of nuclear weapons.

The Bomb

Using the Bomb in 1945

Nuclear weapons preceded and post-dated the cold war. The Western allies developed the atomic bomb in the war against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, and intended to use the weapon in much the same way as they had used strategic bombing against German and Japanese cities. The destruction of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of great significance in post-war affairs, but, as Table 4.4 shows, the scale of the casualties and the extent of the devastation were not exceptional. The precise importance of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in post-war affairs remains a matter of continuing controversy. Aside from the moral issues involved in attacking civilian populations, the destruction of the two cities has generated fierce debate, particularly among American historians, about why the bomb was dropped. Gar Alperovitz in his celebrated book *Atomic Diplomacy*, first published in 1965, claimed that as President Truman knew that Japan was defeated his real reason for dropping the bomb was to coerce the Soviet Union

in post-war affairs to serve American interests in Europe and Asia. Such claims generated angry and dismissive responses from other historians. Ensuing debates have benefited from more historical evidence, though this has only partially resolved the controversies. Inasmuch as a consensus exists now among historians it is that Truman's decision reflected various considerations. Debate remains about how far Truman dropped the bomb simply to end the war and how far other factors, including the coercion of the Soviet Union in post-war affairs, entered his calculations.

Whether Hiroshima and Nagasaki should have been destroyed nevertheless remains a matter for debate. So too is the question of what were the effects of their destruction. Whether the use of nuclear weapons demonstrated the awesome power of such weapons to post-war decision-makers and thereby inhibited their use or whether by accelerating the development of the Soviet atomic bomb Hiroshima speeded up or even started the nuclear arms race are questions to consider.

Table 4.4. Second World War estimated casualties

Hiroshima (6 August 1945): 70–80,000 'prompt'; 140,000 by end 1945; 200,000 by 1950
Nagasaki: (9 August 1945): 30–40,000 'prompt'; 70,000 by end 1945; 140,000 by 1950
Tokyo (9 March 1945): 100,000 +
Dresden (13–15 February 1945): 60–135,000
Coventry (14 November 1940): 568
Leningrad (siege 1941–4): 900,000 +

Sources: Rhodes, R., *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986); Committee for the Compilation of Materials, *Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Gilbert, M., *Churchill: A Life* (London: Heinemann, 1991).

Toward the Global Battlefield

The bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima was equivalent in destructive power to 12,500 tons of TNT. In 1952 the United States exploded a thermonuclear or hydrogen bomb, equivalent to 10,400,000 tons of TNT. Subsequent nuclear weapons were measured in this new megaton range, each capable of destroying the largest of cities in a single explosion. Equally significant was the development of the means to deliver them. In 1945 the American bomber that destroyed Hiroshima took some six hours to cross the Pacific and reach its target. Initially the United States did not possess bombers that had the range to reach the USSR from the USA, and used British and other

bases to hold at risk Soviet targets. Both superpowers developed long-range bombers, and then ballistic missiles that could target the other superpower from their own territory. In 1957 the USSR tested an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) and later that year launched a satellite, *Sputnik*, into space using such a missile. In 1960 the United States began deploying ballistic missiles on submarines. (For details of the technological arms race see Table 4.5.)

By then the world was potentially a global battlefield in which both superpowers could fire nuclear weapons at each other's territory from their own, and in no more than the 30–40 minutes it took a ballistic missile to travel from one continent to the other. The global dimension was increased by

Table 4.5. The nuclear technology race

Weapon	Date of Testing or Deployment	
	USA	USSR
Atomic bomb	1945	1949
Intercontinental bomber	1948	1955
Jet bomber	1951	1954
Hydrogen bomb	1952	1953
Intercontinental Ballistic Missile	1958	1957
Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile	1960	1964
Anti-Ballistic Missile	1974	1966
Multiple Independently targetable Re-entry Vehicle	1970	1975

Source: McNamara, R., *Blundering into Disaster* (New York: Pantheon, 1987: 60).

Table 4.6. The Arms Race: American and Soviet nuclear bombs and warheads 1945–1990

	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990
USA	2	450	4,750	6,068	5,550	4,000	8,500	10,100	11,200	9,680
USSR	0	0	20	300	600	1,800	2,800	6,000	9,900	10,999

Sources: McNamara, R., *Blundering into Disaster* (New York: Pantheon, 1987: 154–5); International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1990–1991* (London: IISS, 1991). Soviet figures given here are based on Western estimates.

the emergence of other nuclear weapon states—Britain in 1952, France in 1960 and People's Republic of China in 1964. In the 1950s there was growing concern at the spread or proliferation of nuclear weapons and in the 1960s a nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was negotiated in which those states which had nuclear weapons committed themselves to halt the arms race, while those states who did not have nuclear weapons promised not to develop them. Despite the apparent success of the NPT agreement several states are known to have developed nuclear weapons (Israel, India, and apartheid South Africa) and others have invested considerable effort in doing so (Iraq, North Korea, and Pakistan).

Both the Soviet Union and United States also made some attempt to develop missiles that could shoot down incoming ballistic missiles and thereby provide defence against nuclear attack. These anti-ballistic missiles (ABMs) were technologically ineffective and both sides continued to rely on offensive nuclear weapons for their security. In 1972 an agreement was concluded which limited ABM defences to a token level. However in 1983 President Reagan cast doubt on the principles of this agreement by launching the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) (see below).

The growth in Soviet and American arsenals is often characterized as an arms race, though how far perception of the adversary and how far internal political and bureaucratic pressures caused the growth of nuclear arsenals is a matter for debate. For the United States, commitments to its NATO allies also provided pressures and opportunities to develop and deploy shorter range ('tactical' and 'theatre') nuclear weapons. At the strategic (or long-range) level qualitative change was as significant as quantitative change. In particular, the fear that one side would have sufficient weapons of sufficient accuracy to destroy the other side's nuclear arsenal became a mutual fear. Robert Oppenheimer, one of

the scientists who created the American atomic bomb, characterized the atomic age as like two scorpions trapped in a glass jar. The scorpions have no means of escape and no alternative but to threaten that which it would be suicidal to carry out. Yet the logic of what became known in the West as Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) depended upon each side being able to destroy its adversary after being attacked. For much of the cold war both sides feared that the other was moving, or believed it was moving, to a position of meaningful superiority. What is clear is that ideas of MAD were of only limited relevance to the military force structures and strategies adopted by the superpowers.

The situation was further complicated by the differences in the attitude of the two superpowers. The Soviet Union was confronted first by a situation of American monopoly, and then by enduring US superiority. This was coupled with political encirclement and growing antagonism with a nuclear armed China. From the American side misperception of Soviet nuclear strength in 1950s was allied with concern about Soviet political ambitions. This was further complicated by US military and political commitments, especially to NATO, and its determination to use nuclear weapons against, and thereby to deter, Soviet aggression toward Western Europe. Even if a nuclear war could never be won, the policies and strategies of both superpowers, and of NATO, can be seen to be ambiguous on these critical issues.

Rise and Fall of *Détente*: Fall and Rise of Arms Control

How far the arms race was the result of mutual misperceptions, how far the unavoidable outcome of irreconcilable political differences are central questions. Some influential Americans believed that the

Table 4.7. Principal arms control and disarmament agreements

Treaty/agreement	Weapon/delivery system	Signed	Parties
Geneva protocol	Chemical weapons: bans use	1925	100+
Limited Test Ban Treaty	Bans atmospheric, underwater, outer-space nuclear tests.	1963	100+
Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty	Limits spread of nuclear weapons	1968	100+
Biological Weapons Convention	Bans production/use	1972	80+
SALT I	Limits strategic arms*	1972	US/USSR
ABM Treaty	Limits Anti-Ballistic Missiles	1972	US/USSR
SALT II	Limits strategic arms*	1979	US/USSR
Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty	Bans two categories of land-based missiles	1987	US/USSR
START I	Reduces strategic arms*	1990	US/USSR

* Strategic arms are long range weapons.

Source: adapted from Harvard Nuclear Study Group, 'Arms Control and Disarmament: What Can and Can't be Done', in Holroyd, F. (ed.), *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons* (London: Croom Helm, 1985: 96).

Soviets were bent on world domination, which the communist rhetoric of world revolution certainly encouraged. What is clear is that nuclear weapons provided the context and pretext for their more dangerous confrontations, most notably when the Soviet Union deployed nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962. It is also clear that when political confrontation gave way to Soviet-American *détente*, agreements on nuclear weapons became the most tangible achievement of *détente*. Yet, just as *détente* was a way of managing East-West conflict, and did not resolve the basis of disagreement, so too, arms control was a means of regulating the growth of nuclear arsenals, not eliminating them (see Table 4.6). On the other hand, critics argued, arms control served to legitimize the existence and growth of nuclear arsenals. Disarmament meant getting rid of weapons. While arms control was sometimes presented as a first step to disarmament it was more generally recognized as a means of managing nuclear weapons.

Yet just as *détente* collapsed in the 1970s, the achievements of the SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) process gave way to renewed conflict and debate over nuclear weapons. In the West, critics of *détente* and arms control argued that the Soviets were acquiring nuclear superiority. Some of these critics also urged that the United States should now pursue policies and strategies based on the idea that victory in nuclear war was possible. The election of Ronald Reagan to the American

Presidency in 1980 was a watershed in Soviet-American relations. The period of the 'Second Cold War' marked a new phase in the political and nuclear relationship between East and West. One issue which Reagan inherited, and which loomed large in the breakdown of relations between East and West, was nuclear missiles in Europe. NATO's decision to deploy land-based missiles capable of striking Soviet territory precipitated a period of great tension in relations between NATO and the USSR, and political friction within NATO. Reagan's own incautious public remarks reinforced perceptions that he was as ill-informed as he was dangerous in matters nuclear, though some of his arms policies were consistent with those of his predecessor, Jimmy Carter. On arms control Reagan was disinterested in arms agreements that would freeze the status quo for the sake of getting an agreement, and the Soviet and American negotiators proved unable to make progress in talks on long-range and intermediate range weapons. One particular initiative had significant consequences for arms control and for the USA's relations both with the Soviets and its allies. The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), quickly dubbed 'Star Wars', was a research programme designed to explore the feasibility of space-based defences against ballistic missiles. The Soviets appear to have taken SDI very seriously, and claimed that President Reagan's real purpose was to regain the nuclear monopoly of the 1950s. The technological advances claimed by SDI

proponents did not materialize, however, and the programme was reduced and then terminated by Reagan's successors.

The advent of Mikhail Gorbachev paved the way for agreements on nuclear and conventional forces, which helped ease the tensions that had characterized the early 1980s. In 1987 Gorbachev travelled to America to sign the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty banning intermediate range nuclear missiles, including Cruise and Pershing II. This agreement was heralded as a triumph for the Soviet President, but NATO leaders, including Thatcher and Reagan argued that it was vindication of the policies pursued by NATO since 1979. The INF treaty was concluded more quickly than a new agreement on cutting strategic nuclear weapons, in part because of Soviet views on SDI. And it was Reagan's successor, George Bush, who concluded a Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (START) agreement, which reduced long-range nuclear weapons (though only back to the level they had been in the early 1980s). By the time that a follow-on START-2 agreement was reached in 1992, the USSR had disintegrated. The collapse of the USSR meant that four nuclear weapons states were now created (Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine). Nevertheless, all the new states made clear their commitments to the treaty and to the new cordial relations with the West, which marked the end of the cold war. On the other hand, the disintegration of the Soviet Union has raised fears about the spread of nuclear technologies and nuclear technologists.

Moreover, the continuing proliferation of nuclear weapons raises the prospect of regional arms races and crises, such as when India and Pakistan are believed to have come close to nuclear confrontation in 1990. The end of the cold war may have reduced some nuclear problems—it may well have increased others. It has certainly not solved the problem of nuclear weapons.

Key Points

- There remains a debate about the use of the bomb in 1945, and the effect that this had on the cold war.
- Nuclear weapons have been an important factor in the cold war. How far the arms race has had a momentum of its own is a matter of debate.
- Agreements on limiting and controlling the growth of nuclear arsenals have played an important role in Soviet-American (and East-West) relations.
- States with nuclear weapons have agreed on the desirability of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to other states.
- Various international crises have occurred in which there has been the risk of nuclear war. Judging how close we came to nuclear war at these times remains a matter of debate.