

# THE END OF THE COLD WAR, 1963-1989

- Chairman                    So, why did the Cold War come to an end?
- Russian historian        One man – Mikhail Gorbachev. It was Gorbachev who initiated Strategic Arms Reduction Talks – the ‘START’ talks, who secured the Intermediate-Range nuclear weapons Treaty in 1987. It was Gorbachev who introduced *glasnost* and *perestroika*, which ...
- Chairman                    ... *glasnost* and *perestroika*? ...
- Russian historian        *Glasnost* is Russian for ‘openness’ – for Communists it meant getting civil rights, e.g. freedom of speech. *Perestroika* means ‘restructuring’, and in Russia it involved modernising business. These ideas completely reformed eastern Europe – everywhere Communism ended, and democracy swept in. Also it was Gorbachev who pulled Russian troops from Afghanistan and ended the Brezhnev Doctrine – you know, the Soviet foreign policy rule that they would not allow Communist countries to change ...
- British Historian        I think you’re fooling yourself. Gorbachev HAD to pull out of Afghanistan and he HAD to stop the arms race because he had run out of money. He HAD to reform the USSR because it was so inefficient and corrupt it was going to collapse anyway. And when countries like Poland wanted out, Gorbachev HAD to let them go because he was too weak to stop them. Brezhnev must have turned in his grave!
- American historian      Agreed! Gorbachev was NOT in control of the situation – there was even a counter-revolution in his own country, and he lost power to Yeltsin. No – if you want to thank someone for ending the Cold War, thank Ronald Reagan. Reagan realised that the west could NEVER have a *détente* with the Soviet Union – instead, he called it ‘the evil empire’ and set about destroying it. It was his ‘Star Wars’ arms programme of 1983 – two years BEFORE Gorbachev became president – which knocked the stuffing out of the Russians. The Soviets didn’t end the Cold War – they lost it because Reagan ... WE... beat them.
- British historian        What about Pope John Paul’s visit to Poland in 1979. It was the first challenge to Communism in Poland, and a year later, the Polish Trade Union *Solidarity* was formed. It was *Solidarity* which displaced the Communist government in Poland in 1989, and *that* led to the collapse of Communism throughout eastern Europe.
- Chairman                    Why did Communism collapse so quickly?
- American historian      Because it was a controlled economy and the whole system was rotten to the core. Workers were assured of a job, so they were lazy and sloppy – remember the jokes about Lada cars ... look at what happened at Chernobyl! The shops were empty, and yet soviet political leaders were corrupt and allowing themselves every luxury. The key was the arms race. It cost America 5% of her national income every year on weapons, but it was costing Russia FIFTY PER CENT of her GDP – it ruined the Soviet economy. It stopped them investing in anything else, and that’s why everything got so out-of-date and run down. By 1989 Russia still LOOKED powerful, but under its propaganda-surface it was frail, and when it started to collapse it went very quickly...

- British historian I just don't agree with you both that the Cold War ended all-of-a-sudden in 1989. I've already mentioned Pope John Paul, but surely we can trace roots going further back even than that? What about the moves towards 'détente' in the 1980s? Table-tennis trips to China, and space rockets docking in space. The Soviet Union promised to grant western-style human rights behind the Iron Curtain at Helsinki in 1975, and America and Russia signed the SALT1 arms limitation treaty in 1972 ...
- Russian historian Precisely! And there was a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty 1968, and a Test-Ban Treaty 1963, the year after Cuba ... yes you CAN imagine traces of the Soviet collapse even to the start of the Cold War... But that was *all* they were ... traces. Nobody got human rights in Russia after Helsinki. All those treaties turned out to be lost opportunities, and the Cold War went on anyway. *Niet*. Something – someONE – was different after 1985, who had the vision to make sure that the opportunity was not lost *yet again* ... and that someone was Mikhail Gorbachev. Do not only believe me – believe President Bush, who said Gorbachev brought 'historically significant changes' – believe *Time Magazine*, who made him 'man of the 1980s' – believe the people who gave him the Nobel Peace prize in 1990.
- American historian Hmm. I prefer the British *Guardian* newspaper, which described the Nobel peace award as a 'consolation prize' for losing the Cold War.
- Chairman So! Was it Gorbachev ... or Reagan ... or the result of the long term development of history?