



Detente

History – Leaving Cert

Quick Notes

Detente

Détente:

- Refers to an easing of tension between the USA & USSR from the mid-1960s until the 1980s.
- Prompted by (1) shock over the “close call” that was the Cuban Missile Crisis, (2) US withdrawal from Vietnam and (3) the soaring cost of the arms and space race was too much of a drain to continue.
- In the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis a “Test Ban Treaty” was signed in October 1963, followed by a “Non-Proliferation Treaty” in July 1968 – both were aimed at halting the spread of nuclear weapons as the previous stock-piling would eventually have either led to bankruptcy or all-out war.
- By 1968, Nixon and his security adviser Kissinger wanted closer relations with the USSR, partly due to being distracted with Vietnam and partly due to a feeling it was less interested in spreading communism around the world.
- The USSR under Brezhnev, for its part, was more worried about worsening relations with China.
- Nixon wanted closer links with China too, recognising it as an emerging power in world affairs and also to put pressure on the USSR – the Chinese had developed their own atomic bomb in 1964 – and he made an historic visit to China in February 1972.

Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT):

Both powers had large stockpiles of both nuclear and conventional weapons (tanks, artillery etc) along with biological and chemical weapons, outlawed by the Geneva Convention.

- SALT began in 1969 in Helsinki – slow progress at first due to 25 years of mutual distrust.
- May 1972 saw Nixon fly to Moscow to sign SALT 1 – the first peacetime visit of a US President to communist USSR.
- SALT 1 had two main components: the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty which limited ABM sites to just two per country and the Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile Treaty which froze both country's number of ICBMs at 1972 levels (USA = 1,054 ICBMs, and 656 SLBMs).

- Exhaustion after Vietnam meant détente was popular in the USA and Nixon visited Moscow again in June 1974, after a visit by Brezhnev to the USA in June 1973, to begin a further round of SALT.
- Gerald Ford, replacing Nixon in September 1974 after the Watergate scandal, made good progress at Vladivostok in drawing up the framework for SALT 2.
- July 1975 saw the Helsinki Final Act recognise Europe's borders as those established after WWII.
- 1975 also saw the Apollo-Soyuz Project marking the pooling of knowledge of space exploration after decades of Cold War rivalry.
- 1976 saw Jimmy Carter replace Ford as President – détente was slowing down but agreement on SALT 2 was still reached in 1979.
- Signed by Brezhnev and Carter in Vienna in June 1979, SALT 2 limited the number of nuclear missiles each side could have to 2,250 of any kind.

The Decline of Détente:

The arrival of the 1980s marked a worsening of relations between the USA and USSR once more:

- Carter's criticism of human rights abuses in the USSR, especially the treatment of dissidents and those who wished to leave, angered the Soviet leadership who saw it as meddling in the USSR's internal affairs.
- Hard-line Republicans and others at home in the USA saw détente as weak and damaging to US prestige – they felt the SALT agreements put the USA at a military disadvantage and they pointed to the success of socialist or communist governments in Africa and South America as the result of “going soft” on communism.
- The “Brezhnev Doctrine” opposing any moves to reform in the USSR or its satellite states (Poland in 1981) worried Carter.
- The Iran Hostage Crisis, lasting well over a year from 1979 to 1981, overshadowed and distracted the remainder of Carter's Presidency.
- The biggest factor in the end of détente was the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 – Carter feared it was the USSR's aim to dominate the entire oil-rich Persian Gulf and vowed in the “Carter Doctrine” that any such attempt would be met by US resistance.

- Carter also placed restrictions on the trade of US goods with the USSR, he suspended the ratification of SALT 2, he had the CIA arm and train the Afghan resistance (the Mujahideen) and the USA boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics.
- Things would not become any rosier with the election of Ronald Reagan as President in 1984.