

## **GORBACHEV AND REAGAN: HOW THE COLD WAR ENDED**

**Compare and contrast the evidence in Sources A and B on Reagan's views of the Soviet Union in the 1980s.**

**Similarity** – Both sources claim that there are signs of positive changes in the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

Sources A and B both show that Reagan believed that the Soviets was changing for the better, despite continuing to frown on the inherent traits of the communist system. Source A shows Reagan's view that "the Soviets themselves may, in a limited way, be coming to understand the importance of freedom". This suggests that at the time of his speech, Reagan was beginning to see a shift in mindset of the Soviet Union to align with his own views of liberty being an inalienable right of the people. His description of the Soviets' improved mindset as "limited" suggests that he still anticipated the undesirable nature of the Soviets. This is also revealed in Source B, in which Reagan praised Gorbachev's actions and declared him as "different from previous Soviet leaders...and is trying to fix" the flaws that plagued the USSR. As a result, Reagan was willing to establish closer relationship with the USSR. Hence, both sources show that Reagan could see an improvement in the ways of the Soviets in spite of his strong views against their fundamental communist belief.

**Similarity explained by context:**

Reagan was referring to the reforms initiated by the new Soviet leader, Gorbachev. The latter's perestroika – to restructure the stagnant command economy, glasnost – to liberalise Soviet politics and new thinking foreign policy – to improve relations with the West and reduce Soviet commitment to its empire, were intended to recover and accelerate the economic development and modernising of the Soviet society and de-escalate bipolar tension.

**Difference** – Reagan's attitude towards the changes that had happened in the Soviet Union. Sources A and B differ on the extent to which Reagan showed confidence/optimism in the Soviets' intentions.

Source A is layered with uncertainty/cautiousness in Reagan's tone, highlighting the fact that he could not feel assured that the Soviets would follow through with the reforms he perceived. Such uncertainty can be seen in the questions he poses towards Soviet reforms, "are these the beginnings of profound change...or are they token gestures?" He also showed his doubts in Gorbachev as he asked "IF [he] seeks peace...prosperity...liberalisation", emphasising the action that must be taken to prove a commitment to positive changes. Source B, on the other hand, displayed higher level of optimism that the Soviets could improve continuously. He stated that "this time, so far, it's different" from when "the state was still expansionist" and that the Soviets could "continue to acting a helpful manner", making it clear that his doubts have been allayed in part, and that he saw great potential in Soviet reforms. Hence, the sources differ in the amount of confidence Reagan had in the changing intention of the Soviet Union and their ability to sustain it.

**Difference explained by time, audience and purpose**

Source A – Jun 1987, East-West relations were improving but there were no concrete signs of progress towards democratisation and openness in the East, and agreements to eliminate the nuclear arms race (nuclear disarmament – INF Treaty was signed only in Dec 1987). So Reagan was speaking not only to West Berliners but also to Gorbachev to follow through with proof of concrete actions if truly he wanted to improve relations with the West.

Source B – by Jan 1989, Gorbachev had carried out various reforms within the Soviet Union and towards E.Europe and the West. Reagan was trying to convince the Americans, especially his right-wing critics, that his foreign policy has borne fruit.

**How far do Sources A - E support the view that Reagan deserves most credit for ending the Cold War?**

**‘Reagan deserves most credit for ending of Cold War’:** thawing of superpower tension and end to the superpower rivalry due to pressure of confrontation and aggressive actions by Reagan rather than the inherent weakness of the Soviet economy which could not sustain the competition with the USA or Gorbachev’s initiatives to de-escalate the rivalry in order to focus on reforming the failing Soviet system.

Source A, C, D support the hypothesis while sources B and E challenge.

**Sources A, C and D support showing that policies undertaken by Reagan ended the Cold War. Sources A and C show the diplomatic and military put pressure on the USSR,**

**Source A (Jun 1987) support:** Increased pressure on Gorbachev to commit to his democratization and liberalization reforms by taking tangible actions to promote freedom and peace. Source A mentions “Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”. This shows that Reagan challenged Gorbachev to take concrete actions to actualise his new thinking policy by tearing the Berlin Wall - a vivid symbol of the iron curtain and East-West division - down. Ending the CW in Europe.

**Source C (1992) support:** At face value, Source C highlights how Reagan’s confrontation policy in heightening the arms race forced the USSR to discontinue any arms buildup, showing how he won the Cold War by bringing an end to military competition through sheer American power. Reagan’s advisor states that the Americans were able to “outspend them [USSR] forever” and bring it to its knees” should the USSR continue its arms race with the US.

**Source D (2004) support:** The cartoon illustrates the commemoration of Reagan’s efforts in ending the Cold War, as portrayed by the collapse of the Berlin Wall that marked the physical division of Europe. Sources A and C provide the context for Source E, suggesting how Reagan’s policies had been effective.

**Evaluate Source A:** Weak support. Reagan’s challenge/dramatic appeal served as an impetus for Gorbachev to defuse the bipolar rivalry tensions between the USA and Soviet Union eg. Commit to nuclear disarmament in the upcoming Washington Summit (Dec 87). Since the speech was made in West Berlin, there could be an underlying purpose to give East Berlin and Eastern Europe some hope that democracy and freedom would be possible. At face value, Reagan was only testing the depths at which Gorbachev was willing to seek cooperation and not so much reliable to show Reagan’s exact contribution to ending the Cold War. The exact contribution to

the fall of the Berlin Wall due to his speech itself is marginal: 1, two years later, the Berlin Wall came down, but it could not be attributed to his speech rather, it was the unintended consequences of Gorbachev's glasnost and renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine, 2. Making such a confrontational speech in 1987 was controversial (and unconstructive) since he had begun his constructive approach (1984 onwards) and built good relations with Gorbachev, and 3. It was feared that it might cause further East-West tensions or potential embarrassment to Gorbachev, since it was an openly provocative, *war-mongering speech*.

**Evaluation Source C:** Weak as a support. Written by Reagan's advisor, likely to credit Reagan (and maybe himself) for the outcome of the Cold War rivalry which ended in USA's favour. But on further analysis, the source did mention that Reagan was aware of the condition of the Soviet economy in the 1980s which was 'doomed to fail' and exploited that advantage by making it unsustainable for the USSR to continue the military rivalry. Hence, it was arguably the inherent weakness of the Soviet economy which allowed for Reagan to win Cold War. [This will be corroborated by Sources E which you can comment on either when you evaluate these challenge sources or at the conclusion to explain why the support argument is not preferred.]

**Evaluation Source D:** Weak support. Contextually, this cartoon was published one day after Reagan's passing. Could be aimed at convincing American readers that Reagan decisively ended the Cold War so that they would commemorate him and preserve his political legacy.

**Overall, the support sources do not make a strong stand on the hypothesis.**

**Sources B and E challenge. Reagan didn't end the Cold War. It was either a result mutual cooperation (Source B) or the inherent Soviet economic weakness that caused it to lose the fight (Sources E).**

**Source B (Jan 1989) challenge:** At face value, the source suggests Reagan is taking credit by being willing to cooperate with the USSR despite the "fake promise of détente in the 1970s" but he also acknowledges that Gorbachev had taken actions to reduce tension and promote cooperation eg. Gorbachev "brought about some internal democratic reforms and begun the withdrawal from Afghanistan". Because of this, Reagan was willing "continue to work together to lessen and eliminate tension and mistrust". Hence, source implies that the Cold War ended because of mutual cooperation.

**Evaluation Source B: valid challenge.** Made in a period of closer relations due to Gorbachev's new thinking (foreign policy and glasnost) that was looked favourably upon by the West. Notable achievements by 1989 include the INF Treaty on nuclear arms reduction, Sinatra Doctrine (Gorbachev's non-intervention in Eastern Europe, Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan). As a farewell address, Reagan intended to highlight his legacy and achievement but also prompt his successor(s) to continue with what he had implemented.

**Source E (2020) challenge:** Rather than the pressure from the USA, Source E argues that the USSR was unable to sustain the competition because of its inherent economic failure. It states that the Soviet economy was "run by bureaucrats without information provided by real market prices, without incentives to be efficient" and "develop and introduce new technology". The inefficiencies of the Soviet leadership in handling of the USSR's economy eventually led to Gorbachev having to implement domestic reforms and initiate new thinking in foreign policy (which had the effect of hastening the end of the Cold War but also the Soviet empire and, in time, the USSR itself).

**Evaluation Sources E:** strong challenge. As an independent political news site, Source E would aim to cover the various angles of the political development without prejudice. Given their strength, Source E would undermine Source C as a support (or overturns C from a support to a

challenge). But more importantly, Source E shows that “defense spending remained flat throughout the 1980s” which suggests that Reagan’s confrontational military strategy had no direct impact on ending the Cold War.

**Overall, the challenge sources make a stronger case against the hypothesis.**

**Conclusion:** overall challenge

Support sources limited by purpose and authorship.

Challenge source B although valid maybe undermined by the provenance (author and purpose).

Challenge source E strengthen by historical distance and analysis that is not influenced by the euphoria of the end of the Cold War.

Hence, more accurate to suggest that Reagan does not deserve most credit for the end of the Cold War.