

## External Pressures on the USSR: USA

### a. Short-Term: President Reagan and "Star Wars"

• President Ronald Reagan (pictured here with his wife, Nancy) contributed to the decline and fall of the Soviet Union by adopting an aggressive, uncompromising policy towards communism. This kick-started a "New Cold War" which placed unbearable pressures upon the already fragile USSR and thereby led to its collapse.

• Reagan became President of the USA in 1980. In his election campaign he had focused on the continued danger posed by the USSR. He was a "conviction politician" – in other words, one with strong beliefs and little belief in compromise. His approach was simple, direct, and popular with many Americans, to whom he became known as the "great communicator".



#### Military build-up



Almost immediately, Reagan announced a 53% increase in military spending over the next five years amounting to \$180 billion – the greatest ever military build-up in peacetime. This money was used to develop new weaponry including the **Stealth** bomber and **Trident** submarines. It was also used to fund the **Strategic Defence Initiative** (SDI), a project which aimed to design a "missile shield" in space which would shoot down Soviet nuclear warheads if they were fired at the USA. Although the project was little more than science fiction, the "**Star Wars**" project was loved by the media and helped to consolidate Reagan's position as a tough, determined "**Cold Warrior**".

#### Alliances with other countries



Reagan was fortunate to come to power at roughly the same time as other committed anti-communists. Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of Britain, was a formidable ally of Reagan and was soon nicknamed "The Iron Lady" by the USSR. She allowed the USA to set up missile bases in Britain. In France and Germany, Francois Mitterand and Helmut Kohl also gave their support to Reagan's aggressive stand against the USSR.

#### Support for anti-communists

- Under the "**Reagan Doctrine**" the President sent financial and military assistance to anti-communist resistance movements and right-wing governments around the world.
- Reagan supported the **Contras**, a right-wing guerrilla group fighting the communist government in **Nicaragua**, and sent troops into **Granada** (part of the British Commonwealth) without even informing Mrs. Thatcher!
- This policy was controversial, but again put pressure on the USSR to spend yet more money and time supporting communists and left-wing governments around the world.

#### Speeches

In a series of speeches, Reagan left the USSR in no doubt about his determination to fight communism.

- In **1981** he said communism was "the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat"
- In **1982** he predicted communism would end up on "the ash-heap of history"
- In **1983** he called the USSR an "evil empire...the focus of all evil in the modern world"



## Tasks

Complete **ONE** of the following tasks.

1. Produce a mindmap of the information in this worksheet.
2. In 1984, Reagan stood for re-election (and won). Produce an election poster to promote his campaign. Focus on simple slogans and images based around the keywords highlighted in bold on the previous page.
3. Produce an acronym which will help you to remember the essential ways in which Reagan helped to secure the decline and downfall of the USSR with his aggressive foreign policy. For example, a way of remembering the terms of the Treaty of Versailles is TRAWL:  
 T = Territory  
 R = Reparations  
 A = Armaments  
 W = War Guilt  
 L = League of Nations  
 Make sure that your acronym is memorable for revision purposes.

## Extension Activities

1. One of the most infamous aspects of the "Reagan Doctrine" was the Iran-Contra Scandal. Find out what you can about this and report back to the class with your findings.
2. In your view, were Reagan's policies brave, or reckless? What's the difference?

## Sourcework Exercise

*Ronald Reagan: Evil Empire Speech, June 8, 1982, to the British House of Commons*

Historians looking back at our time will note the consistent restraint and peaceful intentions of the West...they will note it was not the democracies that invaded Afghanistan...

If history teaches anything, it teaches self-delusion in the face of unpleasant facts is folly...It is the Soviet Union that runs against the tide of history by denying human freedom and human dignity to its citizens. It also is in deep economic difficulty...The dimensions of this failure are astounding: a country which employs one-fifth of its population in agriculture is unable to feed its own people...Overcentralized, with little or no incentives, year after year the Soviet system pours its best resources into the making of instruments of destruction. The constant shrinkage of economic growth combined with the growth of military production is putting a heavy strain on the Soviet people...We cannot ignore the fact that even without our encouragement there has been and will continue to be repeated explosion against repression and dictatorships...

We must be staunch in our conviction that freedom is not the sole prerogative of a lucky few but the inalienable and universal right of all human beings. So states the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, among other things, guarantees free elections.

Our military strength is a prerequisite to peace, but let it be clear we maintain this strength in the hope it will never be used, for the ultimate determinant in the struggle that's now going on in the world will not be bombs and rockets but a test of wills and ideas, a trial of spiritual resolve, the values we hold, the beliefs we cherish, the ideals to which we are dedicated.

The British people know that, given strong leadership, time, and a little bit of hope, the forces of good ultimately rally and triumph over evil. During the dark days of the Second World War, when this island was incandescent with courage, Winston Churchill exclaimed about Britain's adversaries, "What kind of people do they think we are?" Well, Britain's adversaries found out what extraordinary people the British are. But all the democracies paid a terrible price for allowing the dictators to underestimate us. We dare not make that mistake again. So, let us ask ourselves, "What kind of people do we think we are?" And let us answer, "Free people, worthy of freedom and determined not only to remain so but to help others gain their freedom as well."

1. What are Reagan's main criticisms of the USSR?
2. How does he suggest that the USA and her allies deal with the USSR?
3. Does the fact that it is made to the British Parliament make it more, or less, likely to be reliable as evidence of his intentions?
4. Using your background knowledge to help you, how do you think the USSR could defend itself against Reagan's criticisms?
5. What sorts of sources might be more useful to the historian trying to investigate Reagan's foreign policies?