

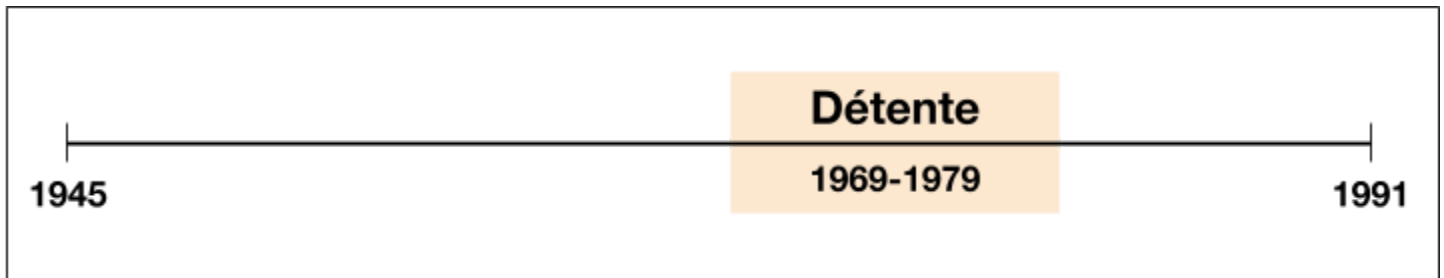
1

What was détente? What effect did détente have on the Cold War?

Objectives: Explain how relations between the US and USSR were affected by détente.

Introduction: Review of Communism

Directions: Examine the timeline below and read the excerpt provided then answer the question that follows.



Détente is a French word that means “relaxation.” When studying history it usually refers to the time in the Cold War between 1969 and 1979 when tension between the Soviet Union and the United States relaxed.

Based on what you have learned about the relationship between the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War, what do you predict will happen during *détente*?

A large empty rectangular box provided for the student to write their prediction.



Watch the [Media Rich Learning Video on Détente](#), read the transcript from the video, and answer the questions below.

[0:20] By the time Richard Nixon reached the White House in 1969, the Cold War had been underway for more than two decades. The superpowers [USA and USSR] had reached a crossroads. They could continue the saber-rattling and confrontations that threatened to plunge the world into nuclear war, or they could agree to disagree and seek areas of mutual interest.

[0:46] In 1969, they chose the latter and a decade of relative calm in the Cold War began. In Europe, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt called it *Ostpolitik*. In the United States, Nixon and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger called it **détente**. It did not end the Cold War but it created a framework for cooperation among the rivals.

[1:14] In 1972, President Nixon embarked on a diplomatic trip that came to symbolize **détente**. When he touched down at Capital Airport near Peking [China] Nixon became the first American president to be welcomed in the communist People's Republic of China. It was a historic opening in the Cold War. During a week of diplomacy and cultural exchange, two former enemies made great progress toward normalizing relations.

[1:54] Not to be outdone, the Soviet Union reached out to the West as well. Leonid Brezhnev [General Secretary of the Communist Party (title of the leader, similar to a President) of the Soviet Union] saw **détente** as an opportunity to gain access to valuable foreign aid and open its borders to international trade.

[2:10] In May 1972, the Kremlin in Moscow [Soviet Union] played host to the American president. Together, Nixon and Brezhnev signed the first-ever agreement to limit nuclear weapons. The SALT 1 [Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty] and ABM treaties were largely symbolic, but they represented a mutual effort to work towards cooperation and coexistence.

[2:40] President Nixon appealed to the Soviet people and their leaders, “...to be better as we look at the prospects for peace we see that we have made significant progress at reducing the possible sources are direct conflict between us, but history tells us that great nations have often been dragged into a war without intending it by conflicts between smaller nations. As great powers, we can and should use our influence to prevent this from happening. Our goal should be to discourage aggression in other parts of the world and particularly among those smaller nations that look to us for leadership and example. With great power, goes great responsibility.”

1. Why did the USSR and USA enter a period of détente?

2. Identify two events that showed that relations between the US and USSR improved when Richard Nixon was President.

3. According to Richard Nixon’s address to the Soviet people, what did the US and USSR need to do to prevent conflict between the two superpowers?

[4:24] **Détente** continued under President Gerald Ford, notably with the signing of the 1975 **Helsinki Final Act**. In Helsinki, Finland, President Ford, Chairman Brezhnev, and thirty-three other world leaders formally acknowledged the post-World War II borders in Europe and recognized “The universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.” Chairman Brezhnev was nervous about the human rights provisions, but his Foreign Minister, Andrei Gomyko, reassured him that it was, “Just a piece of paper.” President Ford said the issue was, “a time bomb” for the Soviets for it established an internationally accepted standard by which communist governments could be held accountable for the treatment of [their] citizens.

[7:33] In the United States, a new President Jimmy Carter made human rights the centerpiece of his new administration.

“The passion for freedom is on the rise.
Tapping into new spirit there can be no
nobler nor more ambitious task for
America to undertake on this day of a new
beginning than to help shape a just and
peaceful world that is truly humane.”

[8:09] President Carter spent three years working in vain to further the calls of world peace and to bring an end to the Cold War. By the end of his term, the Soviet Union's Arsenal equaled the US and America's world supremacy was being openly challenged.

[8:32] In 1979, America's old ally in the Middle East, the Shah of Iran, was forced from power during the Iranian Revolution. Nine months later, student followers of the Shiite Cleric Ayatollah Khomeini stormed the American embassy. Scores of Americans were taken captive and held for more than a year. The hostage crisis coupled with the shifting balance in the Cold War convinced many Americans that their nation had lost its international power and prestige. Then, on Christmas Day 1979 the Soviets struck a vital blow to **détente** when they invaded Afghanistan to prop up a failing Marxist dictatorship.

[9:20] **Détente** had taken the chill off of the Cold War, but it had never been a solution to the deep-seated hostilities that caused it. By 1980, the temperature was falling and sabres were unsheathed. New actors waited in the wings as the stage was set for the final decisive battle of the Cold War.

4. Why do you think President Gerald Ford referred to the human rights agreement in the Helsinki Final Act as “a time bomb” for the Soviet Union?

5. According to the video, why did détente end?