

How did Reagan and Gorbachev's leadership change the Cold War?

May 1988. The Moscow Summit between the USSR and the USA. Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev chat in the blazing sunshine.

But how did they move the Cold War to thaw?

In 1983 Reagan called the USSR the "evil empire". He also increased defense spending and announced the Strategic Defense Initiative, or SDI,

designed to protect the US from a Soviet nuclear strike.

The USSR couldn't afford to keep up. The Soviet economy was failing thanks to its flawed central planning system, where all economic decisions were made by politicians.

In addition, the Soviet army was struggling in Afghanistan. So Gorbachev changed tactics and introduced three landmark policies.

Perestroika, economic reforms to bring in private businesses and investment. Glasnost, free speech and a more open society. And, crucially, New Thinking: foreign policy reform, aimed at reducing defence spending, withdrawing from Afghanistan and allowing Eastern Europe to choose its own path.

All showing that Gorbachev wanted cooperation, not confrontation. Central to New Thinking was more open diplomacy with the West focused on arms control. At the Geneva summit in 1985, Reagan and Gorbachev began to trust each other.

Which helped lead to a breakthrough in Washington in 1987 with the INF treaty, banning short and medium range missiles. The Moscow summit in 1988 ended with Reagan saying that he no longer considered the USSR an "evil empire".

Reagan's pressure. Gorbachev reforms, and their strong personal relationship helped end the Cold War.