Features and consequences of détente
Features and consequences of détente: USSR

After taking over leadership of the Soviet Union from Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev soon became conscious of the economic weakness of the Soviet Union and the urgent need for reform. To help bring about domestic change, he needed a break from the arms race. Détente made that possible. Less money spent on arms meant that more money could be spent on domestic needs.
Features and consequences of détente: USA

In the United States, Nixon and his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, followed the policy of ‘linkage’ – dealing with each aspect of the relationship with the Soviet Union on its merits, while linking cooperation in one area to progress in another. The Americans hoped that their improved links or relations with China would pressure the Soviet Union into also seeking better links with the United States. Once better links or relations were set up with China and the Soviet Union, it was further hoped that the two communist countries would help put pressure on the North Vietnamese to end the Vietnam War. However, linkage only worked in part, and while relations between the United States and both China and the Soviet Union improved, the North Vietnamese displayed their independence and refused to be influenced.
In the end, détente did show that the United States and the Soviet Union could come to terms on many issues. However, it is important to remember that the improved relationship during détente was based on self-interest, as is everything in international relations. In other words, during this period, both the United States and the Soviet Union thought that an easing of tension would be beneficial for their own countries.
Outcomes

One of the most striking examples of détente was the progress made on limiting the numbers of nuclear weapons. In 1972, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT I), which limited the missiles held on each side. There was also an agreement to limit spending on anti-ballistic missiles (ABMs) – defensive missiles intended to shoot down incoming enemy rockets. When SALT I was combined with the Nuclear Accident Agreement of 1971 (which aimed to reduce the risk of accidental nuclear war) and the Sea Bed Treaty that came into effect in 1972 (which banned nuclear weapons from the sea floor outside the territorial waters of each country), it amounted to real progress.
Gerald Ford, in full Gerald Rudolph Ford, Jr., original name Leslie Lynch King, Jr., (born July 14, 1913, Omaha, Nebraska, U.S. —died December 26, 2006, Rancho Mirage, California ), 38th president of the United States (1974–77), who, as 40th vice president, had succeeded to the presidency on the resignation of President Richard Nixon, under the process decreed by the Twenty-fifth Amendment to the Constitution, and thereby became the country’s only chief executive who had not been elected either president or vice president.
Jimmy Carter, in full James Earl Carter, Jr., (born October 1, 1924, Plains, Georgia, U.S.), 39th president of the United States (1977–81), who served as the country’s chief executive during a time of serious problems at home and abroad. His perceived inability to deal successfully with those problems led to an overwhelming defeat in his bid for reelection. However, for his work in diplomacy and advocacy, both during and after his presidency, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2002.
End of Detente

There were hopes that SALT I would mark the beginning of more far-reaching arms limitation treaties; however, even though a SALT II agreement was signed in 1979 – and re-signed in 1993 – it was never completely ratified by both countries. From 1972 there were signs that détente was fading.

In the United States, Nixon had been forced to resign in disgrace. The Soviet Union saw his successors, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, as weak and unreliable. Brezhnev was particularly annoyed by Carter’s attacks on the Soviet Union over human rights, relating to the Soviet Union’s treatment of its own citizens. The Soviet leader saw this as direct interference in Soviet domestic policy. American conservatives began to attack SALT I, saying that the United States had given too much away and had allowed the Soviet Union to keep pace with it in terms of nuclear weapons. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, détente was well and truly dead.