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From Part VII - The End of the Regional Cold Wars Get access Site Type Chapter Information Cold Wars , pp. 605 - 613 DOI: [opens in a new window] Publisher: Cambridge University Press Print publication year: 2020 Get access to the full version of this content by using one of the access options below. (Log in options will check for institutional or personal access. Content may require purchase if you do not have access.) Politics, Law & Government International Relations Cold War, the open yet restricted rivalry that developed after World War II between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. The Cold War was waged on political, economic, and propaganda fronts and had only limited recourse to weapons. The term was first used by the English writer George Orwell in an article published in 1945 to refer to what he predicted would be a nuclear stalemate between two or three monstrous super-states, each possessed of a weapon by which millions of people can be wiped out in a few seconds. It was first used in the United States by the American financier and presidential adviser Bernard Baruch in a speech at the State House in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1947. A brief treatment of the Cold War follows. For full treatment, see international relations. Following the surrender of Nazi Germany in May 1945 near the close of World War II, the uneasy wartime alliance between the United States and Great Britain on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other began to unravel. By 1948 the Soviets had installed left-wing governments in the countries of eastern Europe that had been liberated by the Red Army. The Americans and the British feared the permanent Soviet domination of eastern Europe and the threat of Soviet influence over communist parties coming to power in the democracies of western Europe. The Soviets, on the other hand, were determined to maintain control over eastern Europe in order to safeguard against a possible renewed threat from Germany and they were intent on spreading communism worldwide largely for ideological reasons. The Cold War had solidified by 1947, when U.S. aid provided under the Marshall Plan to western Europe had brought those countries under American influence and the Soviets had installed openly communist regimes in eastern Europe. North Atlantic Treaty Organization U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson (center) calling to order a meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on September 15, 1950. The Cold War reached its peak in 1948-53. In this period the Soviets unsuccessfully blockaded the Western-held sectors of West Berlin (1948-49); the United States and its European allies formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a unified military command to resist the Soviet presence in Europe (1949); the Soviets exploded their first atomic warhead (1949), thus ending the American monopoly on the atomic bomb; the Chinese communists came to power in mainland China (1949); and the Soviet-supported communist government of North Korea invaded U.S.-supported South Korea in 1950, setting off an indecisive Korean War that lasted until 1953. From 1953 to 1957 Cold War tensions relaxed somewhat, largely owing to the death of the longtime Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin in 1953; nevertheless, the standoff remained. A unified military organization among the Soviet-bloc countries, the Warsaw Pact, was formed in 1955; and West Germany was admitted to NATO that same year. Another intense stage of the Cold War was in 1958-62. The United States and the Soviet Union began developing intercontinental ballistic missiles, and in 1962 the Soviets began secretly installing missiles in Cuba that could be used to launch nuclear attacks on U.S. cities. This sparked the Cuban missile crisis (1962), a confrontation that brought the two superpowers to the brink of war before an agreement was reached to withdraw the missiles. Comprehension Quiz: Cold War The Cuban missile crisis showed that neither the United States nor the Soviet Union were ready to use nuclear weapons for fear of the others retaliation (and thus of mutual atomic annihilation). The two superpowers soon signed the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty of 1963, which banned aboveground nuclear weapons tests. But the crisis also hardened the Soviets determination never again to be humiliated by their military inferiority, and they began a buildup of both conventional and strategic forces that the United States was forced to match for the next 25 years. Soviet invasion of Prague-Czechoslovaks confronting Soviet troops in Prague, August 21, 1968. Soviet forces had invaded Czechoslovakia to crush the reform movement known as the Prague Spring.Throughout the Cold War the United States and the Soviet Union avoided direct military confrontation in Europe and engaged in actual combat operations only to keep allies from defecting to the other side or to overthrow them after they had done so. Thus, the Soviet Union sent troops to preserve communist rule in East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Afghanistan (1979). For its part, the United States helped overthrow a left-wing government in Guatemala (1954), supported an unsuccessful invasion of Cuba (1961), invaded the Dominican Republic (1965) and Grenada (1983), and undertook a long (1954-75) and unsuccessful effort to prevent communist North Vietnam from bringing South Vietnam under its rule (see Vietnam War). The late Cold War is characterized by a thaw in relations between the US and Soviet Union in the late 1980s, and mostly associated with the figure of Mikhail Gorbachev and his perestroika reforms in the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, Gorbachev and Reagan conducted a number of summits that led to the reduction of the two superpowers nuclear arsenals. In 1989, Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan, and the revolutionary wave in East Europe replaced communist-backed governments and Soviet allies. At the Malta summit in December 1989, Gorbachev and US President George H.W. Bush declared the end of the Cold War. The next year, the Soviet Union consented to the reunification of Germany. In 1991, the Soviet Union broke up into 15 independent states. MINIMO EFFECT MEETING IN MALTA HUMPTY DUMPTY REDUCED THE NUCLEAR THREAT REPLACING USSR UPHEVAL EUROPEAN WALLS FALL FEEL COMMUNISM POST-COLD WAR ERA COMMUNIST PARADISE IN HOT WATER AFTER THE COLD WAR COLD PART IS OVER SCHOOL SHOOTINGS RED HEAT The Cold War was when there was a lot of political stress between two groups - the Western Bloc, with the United States in charge, and the Eastern Bloc, with the Soviet Union leading. After the Cold War, big changes happened that were ending. These included changes within the Soviet Union, the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the start of new policies that broke apart the strong unity of communist countries. These transformative moments not only signaled the political and ideological shift that was taking place globally but also set the stage for a new world order. The leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev played a pivotal role in policies like Perestroika and Glasnost, which aimed at reforming the Soviet political and economic system. In parallel, the physical and symbolic collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 became a central emblem for the end of the Cold War. This was followed by the official dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which led to the emergence of new independent republics. Key TakeawaysThe Cold War ended with a series of events that included political reforms and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.The fall of the Berlin Wall and Germany's reunification were symbolic and practical markers of the Cold War's end.The aftermath altered global dynamics, leading to new geopolitical challenges and legacies. Historical ContextThe end of the Cold War was a pivotal moment in history, shaped by the tensions that escalated after World War II and the division of global powers into opposing factions.Post-World War II TensionsFollowing World War II, two superpowers emerged: the United States and the Soviet Union. These nations and their respective allies were divided by the Iron Curtain, a metaphorical split that represented the ideological conflict and physical boundary dividing Europe.The Eastern Bloc, the group of satellite states under the influence of the Soviet Union, was established during this period. Notably, at the Potsdam Conference of 1945, leaders, including Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, set the terms for post-war recovery, redefining the divide between the Allied Powers and the Soviet Union.Formation of NATO and the Warsaw PactIn response to growing Soviet influence, the Western Allies formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, aiming to secure collective defense against the Eastern Bloc. The United States also initiated the Marshall Plan to aid Western European economic recovery and prevent Soviet influence in the region. The Warsaw Pact, a military alliance, was formed in 1955, solidifying the division of Europe. The Cold War was punctuated by several critical incidents showcasing deep-seated rivalries and high-stakes tension between the Soviet Union and the Western powers, particularly the United States. These events were pivotal in foreign policy and international relations during the era. Berlin AirliftIn 1948, the Berlin Airlift became a symbol of the Allied powers' commitment to supporting West Berlin amidst a blockade by the Soviet Union. Faced with the challenge of maintaining a lifeline to the city, supplies were flown in around the clock, highlighting the conflict between communist regimes and the desire to uphold Western democracy in a divided Berlin.Cuban Missile CrisisThe Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 marked a peak in Cold War tensions. The United States and the Soviet Union stood on the brink of nuclear war after American reconnaissance revealed Soviet missiles in Cuba. Following intense negotiations, the crisis was diffused, reflecting the delicate balance of power and the constant negotiation inherent in the foreign policy of the era.Checkpoint CharlieStandoffThe Checkpoint Charlie Standoff of 1961 epitomized the division of Berlin and heightened tensions between the East German government and the Western powers. U.S. and Soviet tanks faced off at the checkpoint following a dispute over the U.S. diplomats' access to East Berlin, turning it into a symbol of the Cold War's potential for sudden escalation.Each of these events played a significant role in shaping the latter half of the 20th century, characterized by the persistent struggle between different governance ideologies and the precarious nature of global peace during the Cold War period.Rise of GorbachevMikhail Gorbachev's ascent to power as the leader of the Soviet Union in 1985 marked a turning point in the Cold War. His innovative policies, such as glasnost and perestroika, initiated a process of reform and openness, leading to the eventual end of the Cold War. Glasnost (transparency) and Perestroika (restructuring) aimed to revitalize the Soviet Union, stagnating economy and grant its citizens more freedom. Perestroika aimed to transition from a strict centralized economy to one that embraced limited market mechanisms, including the allowance of private businesses and foreign investment. In contrast, Glasnost sought to foster a more transparent and open governmental environment, promoting freedom of information and easing the strict controls over the press.Reform PoliciesUnder Gorbachev's leadership, reform policies extended to foreign relations, fundamentally altering the Soviet Union's approach to the Eastern Bloc and international diplomacy.Gorbachev's foreign policy was characterized by a willingness to engage in dialogue, reduce nuclear arsenals, and allow greater autonomy in Eastern Bloc countries. These reforms culminated in the:Reduction of Soviet military presenceSigning of historic disarmament treaties with the WestRevocation of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which had previously justified Soviet intervention in Eastern Bloc nations to maintain communist rule.These sweeping changes catalyzed the loosening of the Soviet grip on Eastern Europe and laid the groundwork for ending the decades-long Cold War.The Fall of the Berlin WallThe demise of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, stands as a pivotal milestone in world history, symbolizing the end of the Cold War and paving the way for Germany's reunification.Peaceful ProtestsIn the late 1980s, the German Democratic Republic (DDR) experienced a surge of peaceful protests. Citizens, yearning for political reform and emigration rights, initiated demonstrations. This civil unrest signaled a weakening of the East German regime's grip on power and was integral to the fall of the Berlin Wall.Opening of the Berlin WallThe opening of the Berlin Wall was prompted by the cumulative pressure of the protests and miscommunication by the communist government's spokespersons. On the night of November 9, 1989, the announcement that East German borders would be opened to all people caused a surge of excitement, leading to a symbolic act of tearing down the wall. This event marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War, as it allowed for the reunification of Germany. The fall of the Berlin Wall was a historic moment, marking the end of a system of division and the start of a new era of unity and transformation. In August 1991, a coup attempt by hard-line communists, known as the Gang of Eight, against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev sent shockwaves through the international community but ultimately failed, exhibiting the weakening grasp of Soviet authority. In the backdrop of these dramatic events, the reform policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring), initiated by Gorbachev, catalyzed socio-political change. These policies encouraged open discourse and democratic tendencies within the Soviet republics, which hastened the unraveling of the Soviet political fabric.The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 symbolized not only the physical but also the ideological collapse of barriers separating Communist East Germany from the West. The reunification of Germany in 1990 further signified diminishing Soviet influence in Central and Eastern Europe.By December 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist, splintering into fifteen independent republics. The Cold War landscape was fundamentally altered as the bipolar world order introduced new geopolitical dynamics. Key Dates:August 1991: Coup attempt against GorbachevNovember 1989: Fall of the Berlin WallDecember 1991: Official dissolution of the Soviet UnionMikhail Gorbachev, a pivotal figure in the Cold War's conclusion, stepped down on December 25th, 1991, providing a clear end to the era of communist dominance in Eastern Europe. This event concluded a tumultuous chapter in global history.Germany's Road to ReunificationGermany's journey toward reunification was a transformative period marked by escalating economic and political pressures, which led to the formal merger of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). Economic and Political PressuresSignificant economic struggles and calls for political reform within the DDR, combined with the transition from a centrally planned to a market-based economy, led to widespread dissatisfaction and a desire for change. The DDR's economic stagnation and the political pressures from the West, along with the international community's push for a unified Germany, led to the decision to reunify. The process began with increasing pressure for liberalization. Public demonstrations amplified as East Germans demanded reforms, supported by the policies of glasnost and perestroika in the Soviet Union.Germany's reunification process took a definitive turn on November 9, 1989, when the Berlin Wall came down. This signaled the collapse of the East German government's hold over its people.The following year was punctuated by negotiations and legislative movements. These would culminate in the official reunification of Germany.On October 3, 1990, the two Germanys were united after the Unification Treaty. This marked the end of separate East and West German states. The former East German territories were integrated into the Federal Republic of Germany. This led to significant social, economic, and political challenges that the new Germany would spend the ensuing years navigating.Aftermath and LegaciesThe culmination of the Cold War fundamentally redefined global dynamics and the political landscape of former communist states.Changes in International RelationsWith the cessation of the East-West standoff, countries worldwide witnessed a significant shift in diplomatic strategies and defense policies. The end of bipolarity gave rise to newer, more complex forms of international engagements. The Western allies, particularly the United States and members of NATO, sought to expand their influence and promote democracy in the regions once dominated by Soviet power.Former adversaries engaged in dialogue. They fostered cooperation through numerous treaties and agreements. Establishing partnerships through economic, cultural, and defense alliances became essential in an increasingly interconnected world.Effects on Former Communist StatesThe dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communist regimes across the Eastern Bloc unleashed a wave of transformations.Political systems and governance in these states underwent radical change. This often replaced one-party rule with multi-party systems and led to the formation of new democracies. The transition from a centrally planned to a market-based economy was a monumental task, often leading to economic challenges and integration into global trade systems. These changes set a foundation for future growth. However, they also exposed these nations to new vulnerabilities, including economic inequalities and the destabilizing effects of rapid privatization.Frequently Asked QuestionsThese frequently asked questions address pivotal aspects of the Cold War's end. They highlight the multifaceted processes that led to this significant period in history.What were the defining events that led to the conclusion of the Cold War?The conclusion of the Cold War was marked by several critical events, including the fall of the Berlin Wall, the subsequent reunification of Germany, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. These events signaled the breakdown of the decades-long geopolitical and ideological struggle.Which international treaties or agreements contributed to the closure of the Cold War era?International treaties such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987 played a significant role. This treaty, among others, led to a de-escalation of nuclear tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, thereby contributing to the end of the Cold War.How did the Soviet Union's dissolution influence the end of the Cold War?The dissolution of the Soviet Union was a decisive factor in ending the Cold War. It led to the emergence of several independent countries from the former Soviet bloc, which shifted the balance of power and ended the East-West divide that had characterized the period.What role did global leaders play in bringing about the end of the Cold War?Leaders such as Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan, and Margaret Thatcher were instrumental in the Cold War's conclusion. Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika, combined with Reagan's diplomatic pressure, helped to facilitate a climate of détente.Can the end of the Cold War be attributed to a single event or was it a gradual process?The end of the Cold War cannot be attributed to a single event; it was the result of a gradual process. A series of events and reforms cumulatively led to the decline and ultimate fall of the Soviet Union, paving the way for the end of the Cold War. A single event, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, was a symbolic act that occurred within a broader context of ongoing reforms and international pressures. The process was defined by the bipolar confrontation of two superstates. At Hearst Networks EMEA, we share stories that matter. A global broadcaster since 1955, we reach audiences in over 100 countries, including the UK, Nordics, Benelux, Central & Eastern Europe, Spain, Italy, Germany, Africa and the Middle East. 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Learning is part of the journey at Hearst Networks EMEA and you'll be offered personal and professional development opportunities throughout your career with us. Well do everything we can to see you thrive and grow. By and large, the Cold War was brought to an end by people in the Soviet bloc demanding a relaxation or an end to socialist policies. The pressures they applied undermined and eroded political authority their respective nations. With Moscow no longer demanding adherence to socialist policies, those national governments relented, allowing political reforms or relaxing restrictions such as border controls. In East Germany, the epicentre of Cold War division, popular unrest brought about a change in leadership and the collapse of the Berlin Wall (November 1989). Within a few months, the two Germanys were rejoined after 45 years of division.Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was also in its death throes. After two decades of economic stagnation, the USSR was weakening internally. As the historian John Lewis Gaddis put it, the USSR was a troubled triceratops: it remained powerful and intimidating but on the inside its digestive, circulatory and respiratory systems were slowly clogging up then shutting down. Mikhail Gorbachev's twin reforms, glasnost and perestroika, failed to save the beast. The demise of the Berlin Wall cleared the road for the reunification of Germany. Internal borders between East and West Germany, as well as those within the divided city of Berlin, were quickly removed. West German chancellor Helmut Kohl seized the moment by drafting a ten-point plan for German reunification, doing so without consulting either NATO allies or members of his own party. While most Germans welcomed the move, the prospect of a reunified Germany did not please everyone. It was particularly troubling for older Europeans with lingering memories of Nazism and World War II. British prime minister Margaret Thatcher was privately concerned about it, as were many French, Italians and indeed the Soviets. Israel, now home to thousands of Holocaust survivors with first-hand experience of German nationalism, was another vocal opponent of German reunification. Almost 90 percent of East Germans viewed reunification favourablyIn March 1990, East Germany held its first free elections, producing a resounding defeat for the communists. The two German also states stepped up their political and economic co-operation, agreeing to a single currency (the Deutschmark) in July 1990.Work was already underway on the formalities of reunification and the composition of a new German state. These questions were finalised by the Unification Treaty, which was signed in August 1990 and came into effect on October 3rd.A general election the first all-German free election since 1932 was held in December 1990. A coalition of Christian conservative parties won almost half the seats in the Bundestag (parliament), while Helmut Kohl was endorsed as chancellor. In the years that followed, Germany would dispel concerns about its wartime past by becoming one of the most prosperous and progressive states in Europe. An American cartoon depicting the dissolution of the Soviet UnionThe Soviet Union remained the last bastion of socialism in Europe but it, too, was rapidly changing. Gorbachev's reforms of the mid-1980s had failed to arrest critical problems in the Soviet economy. Soviet industries faced critical shortages of resources, leading to a decline in productivity. Meanwhile, Soviet citizens endured shortages of state-provided food items and consumer goods, giving rise to a thriving black market.Moscows big-ticket spending on the military, space exploration and propping up satellite states only further drained the stagnating Soviet economy. More reforms in 1988 allowed private ownership in many sectors, though it was not clear that the Soviet economy could recover on its own. It needed access to Western markets and emerging technologies. The political dissolution of the Soviet Union unfolded gradually in the late 1980s. A series of reforms in 1987-88 loosened Communist Party control of elections, released political prisoners and expanded freedom of speech under glasnost. Outside Russia, the Baltic states (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) agitated for independence while separatist-driven violence was reported in Azerbaijan and Armenia. In early 1990, the Communist Party accepted Gorbachev's recommendation that Soviet bloc nations be permitted to hold free elections and referendums on independence. By the end of 1990, the citizens in six states Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova had voted to leave the Soviet Union. Ukraine, a region of considerable economic value, also declared its independence in July 1990. The Soviet republics that remained were given greater political and economic autonomy. Many Russians sympathised with the plotters because they approved of their motivation, that of preventing the Soviet Union from unravelling. After the initial euphoria had died down, and people began to face the realities of a disbanded Soviet empire, disenchantment set in. Within a couple of years, the Yeltsin administration was itself pushing for a reintegration of the former Soviet republics.Amy Knight, historianIn 1991, Gorbachev attempted to restructure and decentralise the Soviet Union by granting its member-states greater autonomy. Under Gorbachev's proposed model, the USSR would become the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics, a confederation of independent nations sharing a military force, foreign policy and economic ties. These proposed changes angered some Communist Party leaders, who feared they would erode Soviet power and bring about the collapse of the USSR. In August 1991, a group of hardliners including Gorbachev's vice-president, prime minister, defence minister and KGB chief, decided to act. With Gorbachev at his dacha in Crimea, the group ordered his arrest, shut down the media and attempted to seize control of the government. The coup leaders misread the mood of the Russian people, however, who came out in support of Gorbachev. The coup collapsed after three days and Gorbachev was returned to power. The death of the Soviet Union marked the curtain call of the Cold War. While communist regimes remained in China, North Korea and Cuba, the perceived threat of Soviet imperialism had been lifted from the world. Debate raged then, and continues to some degree now, about who was most responsible for ending the Cold War. Some hailed Gorbachev and other Soviet bloc reformers as the architects of change and reform. Others credited strong-minded Western leaders like Ronald Reagan and Thatcher with bringing down the Soviet empire. Some believed communism was defeated by its own false promises: it was an unsustainable economic system that had collapsed from within. There was some truth in all three perspectives. In the tumultuous 1980s, however, it was the ordinary people of a divided Europe who were the true engine of change. For decades, citizens in the Soviet bloc had lived under oppressive one-party regimes with little or no say in government. They were forced to work, denied the right to protest or speak and denied the choices available to their neighbours in the West. The final years of the Cold War were defined by these ordinary people, who risked their lives to raise their voices and join the free world. Their determination and, indeed, heroism were observed by novelist John Le Carre:It was man who ended the Cold War, in case you didnt notice. It wasnt weaponry, or technology, or armies or campaigns. It was just man. Not even Western man either, as it happened, but our sworn enemy in the East, who went into the streets, faced the bullets and the batons and said: Weve had enough. It was their emperor, not ours, who had the nerve to mount the rostrum and declare he had no clothes. And the ideologies trailed after these impossible events like condemned prisoners, as ideologies do when theyve had their day.1. Three significant events heralded the end of the Cold War: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.2. The fall of the Berlin Wall prompted the removal of borders between East and West Germany, while West German chancellor Helmut Kohl began pushing for the reunification of the two Germanys.3. Despite opposition from some quarters, the reunification of Germany proceeded during 1990. It was formally dissolved and replaced by a looser confederation called the Communist Party of Germany (December 1990).4. The Soviet system in crisis (November 1989)The German Unification Treaty (August 1990)Communist hardliners justify their attempted coup to unseat Mikhail Gorbachev (August 1991)The Minsk Agreement dissolves the Soviet Union (December 1991) Citation informationTitle: The end of the Cold WarAuthors: Jennifer Lewellyn, Steve ThompsonPublisher: Alpha HistoryURL: published: November 2, 2019Date updated: November 20, 2023Date accessed: May 26, 2025Copyright: The content on this page is Alpha History. It may not be republished without our express permission. For more information on usage, please refer to our Terms of Use. By and large, the Cold War was brought to an end by people in the Soviet bloc demanding a relaxation or an end to socialist policies. 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And the ideologies trailed after these impossible events like condemned prisoners, as ideologies do when theyve had their day.1. Three significant events heralded the end of the Cold War: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.2. The fall of the Berlin Wall prompted the removal of borders between East and West Germany, while West German chancellor Helmut Kohl began pushing for the reunification of the two Germanys.3. Despite opposition from some quarters, the reunification of Germany proceeded during 1990. It was formally dissolved and replaced by a looser confederation called the Communist Party of Germany (December 1990).4. The Soviet system in crisis (November 1989)The German Unification Treaty (August 1990)Communist hardliners justify their attempted coup to unseat Mikhail Gorbachev (August 1991)The Minsk Agreement dissolves the Soviet Union (December 1991) Citation informationTitle: The end of the Cold WarAuthors: Jennifer Lewellyn, Steve ThompsonPublisher: Alpha HistoryURL: published: November 2, 2019Date updated: November 20, 2023Date accessed: May 26, 2025Copyright: The content on this page is Alpha History. It may not be republished without our express permission. For more information on usage, please refer to our Terms of Use. Share this: Facebook Twitter Reddit LinkedIn WhatsApp The end of the Cold War is characteristically associated with the fall of the Soviet empire in the late 1989 to 2025 Europe. Other scholars associate it with the fall of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union and of Communism in 1991. On the contrary, by reviewing literature from various scholars and by looking at important actors of observers and key international actors at the time, the Cold War basically ended during the spring of 1989, even before the above mentioned events occurred. This indicates that the Cold War was majorly about conflict of ideologies, and not about the nuclear weapons, military, or even economic equilibrium between East and West. Communism as a governance system was not the real issue. The Soviet Union's collapse was not the result of its economic and political problems. The political dissolution of the Soviet Union unfolded gradually in the late 1980s. A series of reforms in 1987-88 loosened Communist Party control of elections, released political prisoners and expanded freedom of speech under glasnost. Outside Russia, the Baltic states (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) agitated for independence while separatist-driven violence was reported in Azerbaijan and Armenia. In early 1990, the Communist Party accepted Gorbachev's recommendation that Soviet bloc nations be permitted to hold free elections and referendums on independence. By the end of 1990, the citizens in six states Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova had voted to leave the Soviet Union. Ukraine, a region of considerable economic value, also declared its independence in July 1990. The Soviet republics that remained were given greater political and economic autonomy. Many Russians sympathised with the plotters because they approved of their motivation, that of preventing the Soviet Union from unravelling. After the initial euphoria had died down, and people began to face the realities of a disbanded Soviet empire, disenchantment set in. Within a couple of years, the Yeltsin administration was itself pushing for a reintegration of the former Soviet republics.Amy Knight, historianIn 1991, Gorbachev attempted to restructure and decentralise the Soviet Union by granting its member-states greater autonomy. Under Gorbachev's proposed model, the USSR would become the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics, a confederation of independent nations sharing a military force, foreign policy and economic ties. These proposed changes angered some Communist Party leaders, who feared they would erode Soviet power and bring about the collapse of the USSR. In August 1991, a group of hardliners including Gorbachev's vice-president, prime minister, defence minister and KGB chief, decided to act. With Gorbachev at his dacha in Crimea, the group ordered his arrest, shut down the media and attempted to seize control of the government. The coup leaders misread the mood of the Russian people, however, who came out in support of Gorbachev. The coup collapsed after three days and Gorbachev was returned to power. The death of the Soviet Union marked the curtain call of the Cold War. While communist regimes remained in China, North Korea and Cuba, the perceived threat of Soviet imperialism had been lifted from the world. Debate raged then, and continues to some degree now, about who was most responsible for ending the Cold War. Some hailed Gorbachev and other Soviet bloc reformers as the architects of change and reform. Others credited strong-minded Western leaders like Ronald Reagan and Thatcher with bringing down the Soviet empire. Some believed communism was defeated by its own false promises: it was an unsustainable economic system that had collapsed from within. There was some truth in all three perspectives. In the tumultuous 1980s, however, it was the ordinary people of a divided Europe who were the true engine of change. 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