

The End of the Cold War

A combination of factors contributed to the end of the Cold War, including American foreign policies along with economic and political problems in the Soviet Union that caused the loss of Soviet control in several Eastern European countries.

Perhaps the most visible symbol of the Cold War was Berlin, Germany. West Berlin was a thriving, vibrant city with modern buildings and technology while East Berlin still remained damaged and ruined from World War II, with gloomy architecture and limited consumer goods for the people. Dividing the two sectors was the Berlin Wall where for 28 years people had tried to escape East Berlin to freedom, many dying in their plight.

Berlin was a living comparison of democracy and capitalism versus communist politics and economics. When the wall was to come down in 1989, it would also become a signal of the end of the Cold War.



East Berliners looking West at the wall



Tension between West and East Berlin forces, 1961

In June 1961, **President John F. Kennedy** and **Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev** met in Austria. Khrushchev believed that the failed Bay of Pigs invasion showed weakness from the Americans so he tried to threaten Kennedy into removing NATO troops from Europe. Instead, Kennedy increased his financial commitment and military aid to West Germany. The response from the Soviets was the building of the Berlin Wall to stop East Germans escaping to freedom.

In June 1963, President Kennedy visited Berlin to affirm American's commitment to West Germany.

"So let **me ask you as I close**, to lift your eyes beyond the dangers of today, to the hopes of tomorrow, beyond the freedom merely of this city of Berlin, or your country of Germany, to the advance of freedom everywhere, beyond the wall to the day of peace with justice, beyond yourselves and ourselves to all mankind."

In front of the Berlin Wall that separated the city into democratic and communist sectors, he declared to the crowd, "**Ich bin ein Berliner**" or "**I am also a citizen of Berlin.**"



In 1985, **Mikhail Gorbachev** became the new leader of the Soviet Union. At that time, **Ronald Reagan** was President of the United States and Gorbachev criticized Reagan's defense policies and called for a new period of **détente**.

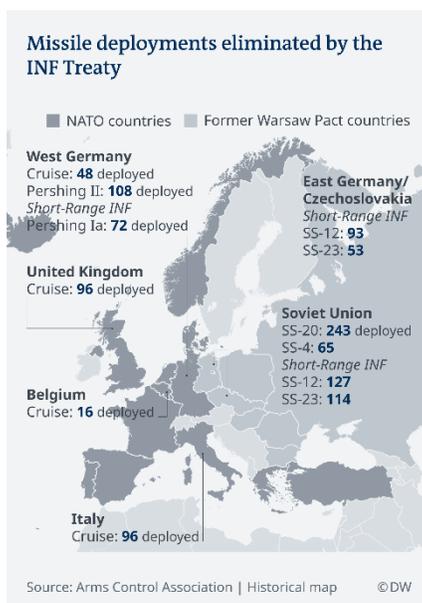


To further his political agenda, Gorbachev initiated his policies of **Glasnost and Perestroika**.

Glasnost: greater openness including increased political freedom in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe. His new idea was well received by both the people of the Soviet Union and by the western world. It started an opportunity for those countries that were made part of the Soviet Union think about possible independence.

Perestroika: The **Command Economy** of communism meant that the government owned and controlled all economic enterprises. The system did not work due to the heavy losses inflicted during World War II while Western Europe was receiving and thriving from the Marshall Plan. Gorbachev's ideas was to now create a **Market Economy** and allow **free enterprise** to improve the poor economic conditions and backward industries. Gorbachev and his wife even travelled to the United States to see first-hand the differences between the two countries and how a market economy led to the availability of consumer goods.

In 1987, the United States and the Soviet Union reached an agreement to eliminate short-range and medium-range land-based missiles.



The **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty** required the United States and the Soviet Union to eliminate and permanently give up all of their nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers.

Key factors that ended the Cold War

Causes

- Anticommunist movements gained force in East Europe
- Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev encouraged Eastern European leaders to adopt more open policies (glasnost and perestroika)

Results

- Reform leaders came to power after free elections in Poland and Czechoslovakia
- New governments took charge in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania
- The Berlin Wall falls, East and west Germany were reunified
- The Soviet Union breaks apart

In 1987, President Ronald Reagan also visited the Berlin Wall and in his famous speech at the Brandenburg Gate, demanded that the Premier Gorbachev and the Soviets **“Tear Down this Wall.”**



The impact of Mikhail Gorbachev’s leadership encouraged independence movements in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. In 1989, the first free elections in 50 years were held in Poland . By 1991, the Soviet Union was a ‘union’ no more, the former republics of Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan and several others had declared themselves independent. The former country of Czechoslovakia now split into the Czech republic and Slovakia. **In December 1991, Gorbachev resigned as he believed he had done his duty but there still remained hardline communist leaders who worked against these changes.**



The Fall of the Berlin Wall, November 9th, 1989, the unofficial end of the Cold War