Cold War Timeline of Events: 1945 to 1991

A summary of the main events that happened during this period. All images from Google Images to give you a better understanding of the events that took place that changed the shape of global society.

February 4th – 11th 1945 Yalta Conference

Meeting between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin to decide what would happen at the end of the war. Topics discussed included – Partitioning of Germany, Fate of Poland, The United Nations, German reparations.

May 8th 1945 V E Day Victory in Europe as Germany surrenders to the Russian army.

July 17th – August 2nd 1945 Potsdam Conference

The Potsdam Conference formally divided Germany and Austria into four zones. It was also agreed that the German capital Berlin would be divided into four zones. The Russian Polish border was determined and Korea was to be divided into Soviet and American zones.
August 6th 1945  The United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima
August 8th 1945  The United States dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki.

August 14th 1945  V J Day The Japanese surrendered bringing World War Two to an end.

September 2nd 1945  Vietnam Independence
Ho Chi Minh proclaimed Vietnam an independent republic from the French.
March 5th 1946  Churchuill’s Iron Curtain Speech

Churchill delivers his ‘Sinews of Peace’ speech which contain the famous phrase “...an iron curtain has descended on Europe”

March 12th 1947  Truman Doctrine

President Truman promised to help any country facing a Communist takeover.

It was Truman’s attempt to enforce his plan of “containment” against the Domino Theory – when one country falls to communism, they all fall!

June 5th 1947 Marshall Plan

This was a program of economic aid offered by the United States to any European country. The plan was rejected outright by Stalin and any Eastern Bloc country considering accepting aid was reprimanded severely. Consequently the aid was only given to Western European Countries.
September 1947    Cominform

The USSR set up Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) which was the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers’ Parties responsible for the creation of the Eastern bloc. To ensure all member countries stayed loyal to Stalin.

June 1948    Formation of West Germany

The French, USA and UK partitions of Germany were merged to form West Germany.
June 24th 1948   Berlin Blockade

Russia’s response to the merger of the French, USA and UK partitions of Berlin was to cut all road and rail links to that sector. This meant that those living in Western Berlin had no access to food supplies and faced starvation. Food was brought to Western Berliners by US and UK airplanes, an exercise known as the Berlin Airlift.

May 1949   End of Berlin Blockade  Russia ended the blockade of Berlin.
April 4th 1949 NATO formed

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization formed with member states Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States

June 25th 1950 Korean War

The Korean War began when North Korea invaded South Korea.

The war will involve both sides invading each other’s territories and end up being a stalemate at the 38th Parallel and a Demilitarized Zone being set up between North and South Korea.

It will later be known as The Forgotten War
March 5th 1953  Death of Stalin
Joseph Stalin died at the age of 74. He was succeeded by Nikita Khrushchev.

North Korea remained affiliated with Russia while South Korea was affiliated with the USA.

This set of documents ended the French war with the Vietminh and divided Vietnam into North and South states. The communist leader of North Vietnam was Ho Chi Minh while the US friendly south was led by Ngo Dinh Diem.
May 14th 1955  Warsaw Pact
The Warsaw Pact was formed with member states East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union.

October 23rd 1956  Hungarian Revolution
This began as a Hungarian protest against Communist rule in Budapest. It quickly gathered momentum and on 24th October Soviet tanks entered Budapest. The tanks withdrew on 28th October and a new government was formed which quickly moved to introduce democracy, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion. The Soviet tanks returned on 4th November encircling Budapest. The Prime Minister Imre Nagy made a World broadcast that Hungary was under attack from the Soviet Union and calling for aid. Hungary fell to Russia on 10th November 1956.
October 30th 1956  Suez Crisis
Following military bombardment by Israeli forces, a joint British and French force invaded Egypt to regain control of the Suez Canal which had been nationalized by the Egyptian leader Nasser. The attack was heavily criticized by World leaders, especially America because Russia had offered support to Egypt. The British and French were forced to withdraw and a UN peace keeping force was sent to establish order.

October 4th 1957  Space Race
USSR Sputnik I launched. The world's first artificial satellite was about the size of a beach ball (58 cm. or 22.8 inches in diameter), weighed only 83.6 kg. or 183.9 pounds, and took about 98 minutes to orbit the Earth on its elliptical path.
November 1st 1957  Space Race

USSR Sputnik II carried Laika the dog, the first living creature to go into space.

1960  Paris East/West talks

Talks between Nikita Khrushchev and Dwight Eisenhower concerning the fate of Germany broke down when a USA U2 spy plane was shot down over Russian airspace.

April 12th 1961  Space Race

Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human being in space.

It was based on this accomplishment that U.S. President J.F. Kennedy vowed to be the first to put a man on the moon.
April 17th 1961  
Bay of Pigs Invasion

A force of Cuban exiles, trained by the CIA, aided by the US government attempted to invade Cuba and overthrow the Communist government of Fidel Castro. The attempt failed.

August 13th 1961  
Berlin Wall

Berlin wall built and borders sealed between East and West Germany.
October 14th 1962  Cuban Missile Crisis
A US spy plane reported sighting the construction of a Soviet nuclear missile base in Cuba. President Kennedy set up a naval blockade and demanded the removal of the missiles. War was averted when the Russians agreed on 28th October to remove the weapons. The United States agreed not to invade Cuba.

November 22nd 1963  JFK Assassination
J. F. Kennedy was assassinated while on a visit to Dallas. Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested for the murder but there has always been speculation that he was not a lone killer and that there may have been communist or CIA complicity.
October 15th 1964    USSR

Nikita Krushchev removed from office. He was replaced by Leonid Brezhnev.

July 1965    Vietnam War    150,000 US troops sent to Vietnam.

It would result in a time of social and political unrest in America, a war that many did not want and were adamantly opposed to. The war would be escalated on several occasions including “carpet bombing” and village massacres by both sides.
August 20th 1968   Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia

Warsaw Pact forces entered Czechoslovakia in a bid to stop the reforms known as ‘Prague Spring’ instigated by Alexander Dubcek. When he refused to halt his program of reforms Dubcek was arrested.

December 21st 1968   The Space Race

US launched Apollo 8 – first manned orbit of the Moon.

20th July 1969   The Space Race

US Apollo 11 landed on the Moon and Neil Armstrong became the first man on the Moon.
April 30th 1970  Vietnam War

President Richard Nixon ordered US troops to go to Cambodia.

September 3rd 1971  Four Power Agreement Berlin

The Four Power Agreement made between Russia, USA, Britain and France reconfirmed the rights and responsibilities of those countries with regard to Berlin.

May 26th 1972  SALT - Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty signed between the US and USSR.

April 17th 1975  Cambodia Killing fields  The Khmer Rouge attacked and took control of Cambodia. Any supporters of the former regime, anyone with links or supposed links to foreign governments as well as many intellectuals and professionals were executed in a genocide that became known as the ‘killing fields’.

April 30th 1975  Vietnam  North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam. The capture of Saigon by the North Vietnamese led to the whole country becoming Communist.
July 1975    Apollo-Soyuz Test Project – A Joint space venture between USA and USSR heralded as an end to the ‘Space Race’

January 20th 1977    Carter President

Jimmy Carter became the 39th President of the United States

November 4th 1979    Iranian hostage crisis. A group of Iranian students and militants stormed the American embassy and took 53 Americans hostage to show their support for the Iranian Revolution.
December 24th 1979  Afghanistan  Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan

July 1980  Olympic Boycott by USA  A number of countries including the USA boycotted the summer Olympics held in Moscow in protest at the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Other countries including Great Britain participated under the Olympic flag rather than their national flag

December 13th 1980  Poland  Martial law was declared to crush the Solidarity movement
January 20th 1981    Iranian hostage crisis ended

The Iranian hostage crisis ended 444 days after it began

June 1982    START

During a summit in Geneva Reagan proposed Strategic Arms Reduction Talks

The talks became to be known as START

July 1984    Olympic boycott by Russia

Russia and 13 allied countries boycotted the summer Olympics held in Los Angeles in retaliation for the US boycott of 1980.
March 11th 1985  Gorbachev leader of USSR

Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union. He would be responsible for major changes to the system and the subsequent end of the USSR.

April 26th 1986  Chernobyl Disaster  An explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the Ukraine remains the worst nuclear disaster in history.

June 1987  Glasnost and Perestroika  Mikhail Gorbachev announced his intention to follow a policy of glasnost – openness, transparency and freedom of speech; and perestroika – restructuring of government and economy. He also advocated free elections and ending the arms race.
February 15th 1989  Afghanistan

The last Soviet troops left Afghanistan

June 4th 1989  Tiananmen Square  Anti-Communist protests in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China were crushed by the government. The death count is unknown.

August 1989  Poland  Tadeusz Mazowiecki elected leader of the Polish government – the first eastern bloc country to become a democracy
October 23rd 1989  Hungary

Hungary proclaimed itself a republic

November 9th 1989  Fall of the Berlin Wall - The Berlin wall was torn down

November 17th – December 29th 1989  Velvet Revolution  The Velvet Revolution, also known as the Gentle Revolution, was a series of peaceful protests in Czechoslovakia that led to the overthrow of the Communist government.
December 2nd, 3rd 1989  Malta Summit

This meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and George H W Bush reversed much of the provisions of the Yalta Conference 1945. It is seen by some as the beginning of the end of the cold war.

December 16th – 25th 1989  Romanian Revolution Riots broke out which culminated in the overthrow and execution of the leader Ceauşescu and his wife.

October 3rd 1990  German reunification - East and West Germany were reunited as one country.
1st July 1991  End of Warsaw Pact

The Warsaw Pact which allied Communist countries was ended.

31st July 1991  START

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty was signed between Russia and the USA.

25th December 1991  Gorbachev resigned

Mikhail Gorbachev resigned. The hammer and sickle flag on the Kremlin was lowered.
26th December 1991  The End of the Soviet Union!

Russia formally recognized the end of the Soviet Union