

The Cold War A Timeline of Major Events 1945-1991

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Introduction

Many visitors to the Canadian War Museum, particularly students, have difficulty taking in all the information contained within Gallery 4. Unlike Galleries 2 and 3, which deal with fairly well-defined activities within a relatively short time frame, the Cold War covers 50 years and a multitude of activities under the overarching umbrella of a nuclear standoff.

The following is intended to provide some connection between 1945 and 1991 through a brief description of some of the principal activities that shaped the standoff, its eventual conclusion, and the nature of the post-Cold War world. The events that are specifically addressed in Gallery 4 are noted.

For those who think the Cold War was a boring, historical wasteland, think again! The following chronology is by no means a complete compendium of world events during the period 1945–91. However, it should be noted that although the Cold War ended, many of the problematic issues that arose during that period continue to fester today—the Middle East, the Korean Peninsula, Afghanistan and the African continent, to name but a few. Further information about the underlined items in this text can be found in wikipedia.org.

February 4–11, 1945: Start of the Cold War; the Yalta Conference

A meeting of the Big Three (U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, United Kingdom Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet Leader Joseph Stalin) was held near Yalta during the closing months of World War II (WWII) to discuss the dividing up of Germany; the formation of the United Nations; German war reparations; the entry of Soviet forces into the Far-Eastern front (Japan); and, the most difficult issue, the future of Poland. The conference highlighted fundamental disagreements between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies.

August 6 and 9, 1945: Atomic Bombs Dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki



Fat Man

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima (August 6) and Nagasaki (August 9) were U.S. nuclear attacks near the end of WWII against the Empire of Japan by the executive order of U.S. President [Harry S. Truman](#). After six months of intense [fire-bombing of 67 other Japanese cities](#), followed by an ultimatum that was ignored by the [Shōwa regime](#), the nuclear weapon “[Little Boy](#)” was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, followed three days later by the detonation of the “[Fat Man](#)” nuclear bomb over Nagasaki. These are, to date, the only attacks with nuclear weapons in the history of warfare.

The bombs killed as many as 140,000 people in Hiroshima and 80,000 in Nagasaki by the end of 1945, roughly half on the days of the bombings. Among these, 15–20 per cent died from injuries or the combined effects of flash burns, trauma and radiation burns, compounded by illness and radiation sickness. Since then, more have died from leukemia (231 observed) and solid cancers (334 observed) attributed to exposure to radiation

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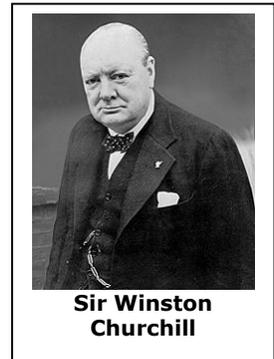
released by the bombs. In both cities, the overwhelming majority of the dead were civilians.

August 14, 1945: Japan Surrenders; End of WWII

On August 15, six days after the atomic bomb detonation over Nagasaki, Japan announced its surrender to the Allied Powers, signing the [Instrument of Surrender](#) on September 2, officially ending the Pacific War and therefore WWII. (Germany had signed its unavoidable [Instrument of Surrender](#) on May 7, ending the war in [Europe](#).) The atomic bombings led, in part, to post-war Japan adopting [Three Non-Nuclear Principles](#), forbidding that nation from nuclear armament.

March 5, 1946: Winston Churchill Delivers "Iron Curtain" Speech

Churchill's speech delivered at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, to an audience including President Truman contained the following iconic phrases that summarized the division of Europe: *"From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow."*



1945–47: Greek Civil War

This was fought between Greek communist and nationalist forces. The latter were supported by the British, who were an occupying force at the end of WWII. U.S. aid eventually turned the tide in favour of the nationalists. Some 100,000 were killed in the conflict.

April 14–15, 1947: Partition of India

The Partition of India led to the creation, on August 14, 1947, and August 15, 1947, respectively, of the sovereign states of the Dominion of Pakistan (later the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and People's Republic of Bangladesh) and the Union of India (later the Republic of India).

1947: Marshall Plan Announced

In the immediate post-WWII period, Europe remained ravaged by war and thus susceptible to exploitation by an internal and external communist threat. In a June 5, 1947, speech to the graduating class at Harvard University, Secretary of State George C. Marshall issued a call for a comprehensive program to rebuild Europe. Fanned by the fear of communist expansion and the rapid deterioration of European economies in the winter of 1946–47, Congress passed the Economic Cooperation Act (Marshall Plan) in March 1948 and approved funding that would eventually rise to over \$12 billion for the rebuilding of Western Europe.

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1948–60: Malayan Emergency

The Malayan Emergency refers to a guerrilla war for independence fought between Commonwealth armed forces and the [Malayan National Liberation Army](#), the military arm of the Malayan Communist Party, from 1948 to 1960. The emergency ended with the defeat of the communists and the establishment of an independent Federation of Malaysia.

February 1948: Czechoslovak Coup d'Etat

After an election in 1946, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia began to lose some of its popularity, and as a 1948 election approached its public support began to decline. Not leaving anything to chance, the communists staged a coup d'état in February 1948 rather than wait for the scheduled May election. To ensure passivity among military units that might object to such unconstitutional methods, the government confined all non-communist commanders to quarters. Various units under communist command were placed on alert during the coup, but they were not needed as the legitimate government was ousted and a Moscow-oriented, communist regime installed.

May 1948–March 1949: First Arab-Israeli War

The first Arab–Israeli war commenced upon the termination of the [British Mandate of Palestine](#) in mid-May 1948, following a previous phase of civil war in 1947–48. After the rejection of the 1947 [United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine](#) (UN General Assembly Resolution 181) that would have created an Arab state and a Jewish state side by side, five Arab states invaded the territory of the former British Mandate of Palestine. Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria attacked the nascent state of Israel, leading to fighting mostly on the former territory of the British Mandate and, for a short time, on the Sinai Peninsula and in southern Lebanon. The war concluded with the [1949 Armistice Agreements](#). The Israeli victory led to the establishment of the Israeli state and helped sow the seeds for future conflict with its Arab neighbours.

June 1948–May 1949: Berlin Airlift

During the multinational occupation of post-WWII Germany, the Soviet Union blocked the Western force's railway and road access to the western sectors of Berlin. Its aim was to force the Western powers to allow the Soviet-controlled regions to start supplying Berlin with food and fuel, thereby giving the Soviet Union practical control over the entire city.

In response, the Western Allies formed the Berlin Airlift to bring supplies to the people of Berlin. The U.S. Air Force, Royal Air Force and others flew over 200,000 flights that provided 13,000 tons of food daily, for the next year. By the spring of 1949, the effort was clearly succeeding, and by April the airlift was delivering more cargo than had previously flowed into the city by rail.

The success of the Berlin Airlift was humiliating to the Soviets, who had repeatedly claimed it could never work. They lifted their blockade in May.

Information on the Berlin Airlift is contained in Gallery 4.

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July 1949: NATO Formed



The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was set up to discourage an attack by the Soviet Union on the non-communist nations of Western Europe. As of 2009, the 28 member countries are Albania (2009), **Belgium**, Bulgaria (2004), **Canada**, Croatia (2009), Czech Republic (1999), **Denmark**, Estonia (2004), **France**, Federal Republic of Germany (1955), Greece (1952), Hungary (1999), **Iceland**, **Italy**, Latvia (2004), Lithuania (2004), **Luxembourg**, **Netherlands**, **Norway**, Poland (1999), **Portugal**, Romania (2004), Slovakia (2004), Slovenia (2004), Spain (1982), Turkey (1952), the **United Kingdom** and the **U.S.A.** (The 12 original members are indicated in bold; the date of accession of other members is indicated in parentheses.)

The flags of the original 12 members fly in Gallery 4 along with some information on the formation of the Alliance.

September 1949: Chinese Civil War Ends

The Chinese Civil War was a conflict that begun in the 1930s between the Communist Party of China under Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese Nationalist Party under Chiang Kai-shek. The conflict was interrupted by WWII but resumed in 1946 and led to the establishment of the communist People's Republic of China on the mainland and non-communist, nationalist Taiwan.



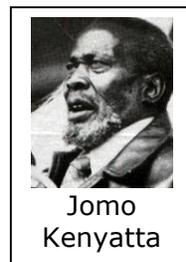
September 1949: Soviet Union Explodes its First Atomic Bomb

The Soviet atomic project benefited from highly successful espionage efforts on the part of Soviet military intelligence (GRU) as well as the foreign intelligence department of the People's Commissariat Internal Affairs (NKVD). Evidence from intelligence sources in the United Kingdom had a role to play in the decision of the Soviet State Defence Council (GKO) in September 1942 to approve resolution 2352, which signalled the beginning of the Soviet atomic bomb project.

Through sources in the Manhattan project, notably [Klaus Fuchs](#), Soviet intelligence obtained important information on the progress of the U.S. atomic bomb effort. Intelligence reports were shown to the head of the Soviet atomic project, Igor Kurchatov, and had a significant impact on the direction of his own team's research.

1952-60: Mau Mau Uprising

The Mau Mau Uprising was an insurgency by Kenyan peasants against British colonialist rule. The core of the resistance was formed by members of the [Kikuyu](#) ethnic group along with smaller numbers of [Embu](#) and [Meru](#) led by Jomo Kenyatta. The uprising failed militarily, yet it hastened Kenyan independence in 1963 and motivated Africans in other countries to fight against colonial rule.



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November 1, 1952: Explosion of First Hydrogen Bomb

The U.S. achieved nuclear fusion for the first time when it exploded the first hydrogen bomb at the Eniwetok Atoll Proving Grounds. The first “true” Soviet hydrogen bomb was exploded on November 22, 1955.

June 1950–July 1953: Korean War

The Korean War arose from the attempts of the two Korean powers to reunify Korea under their respective governments. Negotiations ended when the North Korean Army invaded the South on June 25, 1950. Under the aegis of the United Nations, countries allied with the U.S. intervened on behalf of South Korea. After rapid advances in a South Korean and allied counterattack, Chinese forces intervened on behalf of North Korea, shifting the balance of the war and ultimately leading to an armistice that approximately restored the original boundaries between North and South Korea.

Altogether, 26,791 Canadians served in the Korean War and another 7,000 served in the theatre between the ceasefire and the end of 1955. United Nations forces (including South Korean) fatal and non-fatal battle casualties numbered about 490,000. Of these, 1,558 were Canadian. The names of 516 Canadian war dead are inscribed in the Korean Book of Remembrance.

There is a display in Gallery 4 devoted to Canada’s role in the Korean War.

July 21, 1954: Launch of the USS Nautilus

The USS Nautilus was the world’s first nuclear-powered submarine, thereby adding a new dimension to sea warfare and, ultimately, to the Cold War.



July 1954: Vietnam Split at 17th Parallel

The war between the communist Viet Minh forces and France that began in 1946 came to an end with the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu, and Vietnam was divided into communist North Vietnam and democratic South Vietnam.

1954–62: Algerian War of Independence

The Algerian War of Independence was a conflict between France and various Algerian independence movements that led to Algeria gaining her independence from France. An important decolonization war, it was a complex conflict characterized by guerrilla warfare, terrorism against civilians, use of torture on both sides and counter-terrorism operations by the French Army. Effectively started by members of the [National Liberation Front](#) (FLN) on November 1, 1954, during the [Toussaint Rouge](#) (Red All Saints’ Day), the war shook the French Fourth Republic’s (1946–58) foundations and led to its collapse.

January 26, 1955: End of War between the USSR and Germany

The USSR formally ended its state of war with Germany nearly 10 years after the German unconditional surrender to the Allies.

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May 14, 1955: Warsaw Pact formed

The Warsaw Pact was signed in Warsaw, Poland. The Pact stated that if any member nation were to be the victim of aggression, the other member nations would launch a defence. The Soviet Union initiated the Pact in response to West Germany entering the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#) in 1955.

The founding members of the Warsaw Pact were Albania (left in 1968), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union.

There is information pertaining to the Warsaw Pact and its member nations in the Cold War Simulation section of Gallery 4.

October–November 1956: Hungarian Revolution Crushed

The Hungarian Revolution was a spontaneous, nationwide revolt against the Stalinist government of the People's Republic of Hungary and its Soviet-imposed policies, lasting from October 23 until November 10, 1956.

The revolt began as a student demonstration that attracted thousands as it marched through central Budapest to the Parliament buildings. The revolt spread quickly across Hungary and the government fell. Thousands organized into militias, battling the State Security Police (ÁVH) and Soviet troops.

Impromptu councils wrested municipal control from the ruling [Hungarian Working People's Party](#) and demanded political changes. The new government formally disbanded the ÁVH, declared its intention to withdraw from the [Warsaw Pact](#) and pledged to re-establish free elections. By the end of October, fighting had almost stopped and a sense of normality began to return.

After announcing a willingness to negotiate a withdrawal of Soviet forces, the [Politburo](#) changed its mind and moved to crush the revolution. On November 4, a large Soviet force invaded Budapest and other regions of the country.

Hungarian resistance continued until November 10. Over 2,500 Hungarians and 700 Soviet troops were killed in the conflict, and 200,000 Hungarians fled as refugees, many to Canada.



Lester Pearson

October 31, 1956: Egypt Takes Control of the Suez Canal (Second Arab–Israeli War)

On October 31, 1956, British, French and Israeli troops invaded Egypt in what would prove to be an ineffective and unpopular attempt to gain control of the Suez Canal after it had been nationalized by Egypt. The international outcry against the Suez invasion was swift. The U.S. was harshly critical of its traditional allies and led a censure movement at the United Nations. A resolution on the Suez crisis was passed and fighting came to an end seven days after it began. Two weeks later, United Nations troops moved

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into the canal zone where they would remain as a peacekeeping force for the following 10 years.

This was the first United Nations peacekeeping mission—an initiative of Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson.

Information pertaining to Lester Pearson’s initiative and his winning of the Nobel Prize can be found in the Peacekeeping corner of Gallery 4.

October 4, 1957: Sputnik Launched

Sputnik was the world’s first Earth-orbiting artificial satellite. It was launched into a [low-altitude elliptical orbit](#) by the Soviet Union on October 4, 1957, and was the first in a series of satellites collectively known as the [Sputnik program](#). The unanticipated announcement of Sputnik 1’s success ignited the [Space Race](#) within the Cold War.

May 12, 1958: Signing of the North American Air Defence (NORAD) Agreement



The common defence of the North American continent traces its history back to 1940, when Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt met to discuss the war in Europe and mutual defence concerns.

In September 1957, the two nations agreed to create NORAD as a bi-national command that would centralize operational control of continental air defences against the threat of Soviet bombers. NORAD was finalized on May 12, 1958, and included 11 principles governing its organization and operation, which were to be renewed every 10 years. Despite the end of the Cold War, NORAD remains in existence to this day and is headquartered in Colorado Springs.

There is reference to NORAD in Gallery 4.

January 1959: Fidel Castro Takes Power in Cuba



Fidel Castro

Castro came to power as a result of the [Cuban revolution](#) that overthrew the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, and he shortly thereafter became Cuba’s prime minister. In 1965 he became [First Secretary](#) of the [Communist Party of Cuba](#) and led the transformation of Cuba into a one-party socialist republic. The establishment of a communist regime so close to the U.S. created a concern that erupted into crisis in 1962.

May 1, 1960: U-2 Incident

The U-2 Incident occurred on May 1, 1960, when a U.S. [U-2](#) spy plane was shot down over the Soviet Union. At first the U.S. government denied the plane’s purpose and mission, but later admitted that it was a covert [surveillance](#) aircraft when the Soviet government

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U-2 Spy Plane

produced its remains and surviving pilot, [Francis Gary Powers](#). Coming just over two weeks before the scheduled opening of an East-West summit in [Paris](#), the incident was a great embarrassment to the U.S. and led to a marked deterioration in its relations with the Soviet Union.

July 20, 1960: First Launch of an SLBM

The first underwater launch of a Polaris Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) was successfully carried out from the USS George Washington (SSBN-598) off Cape Canaveral, Florida.

April 12, 1961: Yuri Gagarin Orbits the Earth

On April 12, 1961, the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human in outer space and the first to orbit the Earth.



Yuri Gagarin

April 17-19, 1961: Bay of Pigs Invasion

The Bay of Pigs Invasion was an unsuccessful attempt by U.S.-trained Cuban exiles to invade southern Cuba with support from U.S. government armed forces to overthrow the Cuban government of Fidel Castro. The Cuban armed forces, trained and equipped by [Eastern Bloc](#) nations, defeated the exile combatants in three days. The failed invasion severely embarrassed the Kennedy Administration and made Castro wary of future U.S. intervention in Cuba.

August 13, 1961: Construction of the Berlin Wall Begins

The Berlin Wall was a physical barrier completely encircling West Berlin, separating it from the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), including East Berlin. The longer intra-German border demarcated the border between East and West Germany. Both borders came to symbolize the [Iron Curtain](#) between Western Europe and the Eastern Bloc.

The wall and the intra-German border separated East Germany from West Germany for more than a quarter-century from the day construction began on August 13, 1961, until the wall was torn down on November 9, 1989. During this period, at least 98 people were confirmed killed trying to cross into West Berlin, according to official figures. However, a prominent victims group claims that more than 200 people were killed trying to flee from East to West Germany.

October 1962: Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis was a confrontation between the U.S., the Soviet Union and Cuba in October 1962. The Cuban and Soviet governments decided in September 1962 to place nuclear missiles in Cuba to protect it from U.S. harassment. When U.S. intelligence discovered the weapons, the U.S. government decided to do all it could to ensure the

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removal of them. The crisis ranks with the [Berlin Blockade](#) as one of the major confrontations of the Cold War, and is generally regarded as the moment in which the Cold War came closest to a nuclear war.

Although the Canadian government remained undecided on a course of action during the crisis, the Canadian armed forces were placed on a high state of alert, and units of the Royal Canadian Air Force and Royal Canadian Navy participated in the U.S. blockade.

The “hot line” between Moscow and Washington was established as a result of this crisis as a means to forestall future events of brinkmanship.

Gallery 4 contains information pertaining to the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Canadian reaction.

October 30, 1961: Explosion of Tsar Bomba

The [Tsar Bomba](#) was the largest, most powerful nuclear weapon ever detonated. It was a three-stage [hydrogen bomb](#) with a yield of about 50 [megatons](#), equivalent to 10 times the amount of all the explosives used in WWII combined. Capable of approximately 100 megatons but purposely reduced shortly before the launch, the Tsar Bomba was detonated on October 30, 1961, in the [Novaya Zemlya archipelago](#). Although weaponized, it was not entered into service but was simply a demonstrative testing of the capabilities of the Soviet Union’s military technology at that time. The explosion was hot enough to induce third-degree burns at a 100-kilometre distance.

April 10, 1963: Loss of the USS Thresher

The U.S. nuclear attack submarine USS Thresher was lost with its entire crew of 129. This was the first known loss of a nuclear submarine.

July 1963: Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) Ratified

After the Cuban Missile Crisis, U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev signed the LTBT that prohibited nuclear weapon test explosions and any other nuclear explosions in three environments: in the atmosphere, in outer space and underwater, but did not prohibit underground nuclear explosions.

During the negotiation of the LTBT, the phrase “or any other nuclear explosion” was included for the specific purpose of prohibiting explosions of nuclear devices for peaceful applications, so-called “peaceful nuclear explosions” or “PNEs.” LTBT negotiators recognized that any nuclear explosion could provide military benefits to the detonator, and therefore that without the inclusion of this phrase a State Party could conduct nuclear explosions to its benefit on the pretence that the explosions were solely for peaceful purposes and not “nuclear weapon test explosions.”



John Kennedy signing Treaty

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1964–73: The Vietnam War (U.S. involvement)

The overarching geopolitical aim behind the U.S. involvement in Vietnam was to contain the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. This involvement began during the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953–61), which sent U.S. military advisors to South Vietnam, and continued with President John F. Kennedy (1961–63), decided to commit and send 4000 U.S. support troops to South Vietnam in 1962.

Under President Lyndon B. Johnson (1963–68), U.S. intervention mushroomed both militarily and politically. Johnson asked for a resolution expressing U.S. determination to support freedom and protect peace in Southeast Asia. Congress responded with the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, expressing support for “all necessary measures” that the President might take to repel armed attacks against U.S. forces and prevent further aggression.

The U.S. escalated its participation in the war to a peak of 543,000 troops in April 1969. U.S. forces in Southeast Asia operated under some stringent restrictions, including being forbidden to invade enemy territory in North Vietnam and, for many years, likewise being barred from ground operations against enemy sanctuaries in bordering Laos and Cambodia. The “body count” of Vietcong killed was the centerpiece of the U.S. approach to waging the war, conducted through search-and-destroy operations in remote jungle regions. By 1966 it became increasingly clear that this strategy of attrition was not working and could not work because of the enemy’s capacity to replace losses far higher than those the allies were able to inflict.

President Richard M. Nixon (1969–74) was elected on the claim that he had a “secret plan” for honourably disengaging U.S. troops, which succeeded initially only in intensifying the conflict. This last phase of U.S. involvement in South Vietnam was carried out under a broad policy called Vietnamization. Its main goal was to create strong, largely self-reliant South Vietnamese military forces. Vietnamization also meant the withdrawal of a half-million American soldiers.

This war became hugely unpopular in the U.S. and fostered a vocal peace movement and a generation of anti-war “flower children.”

During the early months of 1974, the North Vietnamese army advanced from the north and west on the southern capital. They soon surrounded Saigon with an ever-tightening perimeter. Saigon fell to the communists on April 29, 1975. On the morning of April 30, the last marine boarded a CH-46 helicopter atop the American embassy in Saigon and took off eastward disappearing into the blue horizon. It was 21 years after the first advisors arrived in country and nearly three years after the last combat troops withdrew.

There is mention in Gallery 4 of participation of a number of Canadians in the Vietnam War.

April 1965: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic

When civil strife broke out in the Dominican Republic in April 1965, the U.S. decided to dispatch troops to protect American lives and to prevent a possible Castro-type takeover by communist elements. Marines were landed on April 28 from ships offshore, and

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two battalions of the 82nd Airborne Division and their supporting forces were ordered to move with minimum essential equipment from Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina, to Ramey Air Force Base, Puerto Rico, on the April 29.

By May 8, U.S. forces in the island republic totalled 14,000 men, including paratroop units flown from the U.S. and marines landed by navy ships. The evening before, in a televised address, President Johnson had said "What began as a popular democratic revolution that was committed to democracy and social justice moved into the hands of a band of communist conspirators." Later in the same address, he declared "We will defend our nation against all those who seek to destroy not only the United States but every free country of this hemisphere."

June 5–10, 1967: Third Arab-Israeli War (The Six-Day War)

The Six-Day War of June 5–10, 1967, was a war between the Israeli army and the armies of the neighboring states of Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser expelled the [United Nations Emergency Force](#) from the [Sinai Peninsula](#) in May 1967. Egypt amassed 1,000 tanks and nearly 100,000 soldiers on the Israeli border and closed the [Straits of Tiran](#) to all ships flying Israeli flags or carrying strategic materials, receiving strong support from other Arab countries. Israel responded with a similar mobilization that included the call-up of 70,000 reservists to augment the regular Israel Defense Forces.

On June 5, 1967, Israel launched a pre-emptive attack against Egypt's airforce. Jordan, which had signed a mutual defence treaty with Egypt on May 30, then attacked western Jerusalem and Netanya.

At the war's end, Israel had gained control of the Sinai Peninsula, the [Gaza Strip](#), the [West Bank](#), East Jerusalem and the [Golan Heights](#). The results of the war affect the geopolitics of the region to this day.

1967–75: Cambodian Civil War

The Cambodian Civil War was a conflict that pitted the forces of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (known as the [Khmer Rouge](#)) and their allies—the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and the [National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam](#) (Viet Cong)—against the government forces of Cambodia (after October 1973, the Khmer Republic), which were supported by the U.S. and the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam).

The struggle was exacerbated by the influence and actions of the allies of the two warring sides. The People's Army of Vietnam (North Vietnamese Army) involvement was designed to protect its Base Areas and sanctuaries in eastern Cambodia, without which the prosecution of its military effort in South Vietnam would have been more difficult. The U.S. was motivated by the need to buy time for its withdrawal from Southeast Asia and to protect its ally, South Vietnam. U.S., South and North Vietnamese forces directly participated (at one time or another) in the fighting. The central government was mainly assisted by the application of massive U.S. aerial bombing campaigns and direct material and financial aid.

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After five years of savage fighting that brought about massive casualties, the destruction of the economy, the starvation of the population and grievous atrocities, the Republican government was defeated on April 17, 1975, when the victorious Khmer Rouge proclaimed the establishment of Democratic Kampuchea. This conflict, although an indigenous civil war, was considered to be part of the larger Vietnam War (1963–78) that also consumed the neighboring Kingdom of Laos, plus South and North Vietnam. This civil war led to the [Cambodian Genocide](#), one of the bloodiest in history.

January 23, 1968: The Pueblo Incident

USS Pueblo (AGER-2) was a [Banner-class](#) technical research ship (navy intelligence) boarded and captured by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on January 23, 1968, in what is known as the Pueblo incident.



North Korea stated that the Pueblo strayed into its territorial waters, but the [U.S.](#) maintains that the vessel was in international waters at the time of the incident. More recently, facts have come to light that indicate that USS Pueblo was captured by North Korea at the instigation of the [Soviet Union](#), which was seeking a [cryptographic](#) machine onboard to match a key provided to the Soviets by the spy [John Walker](#).

Pueblo, still held by the DPRK today, officially remains a commissioned vessel of the U.S. Navy. It is currently located in Pyongyang, where it is used as a museum ship.

August 1968: Czechoslovak Revolution

In 1968, in response to a brief period of liberalization, five Eastern Bloc countries invaded Czechoslovakia. Soviet tanks rolled into Prague on August 21, 1968. Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev viewed this intervention as vital to the preservation of the Soviet socialist system and vowed to intervene in any state that sought to replace Marxism–Leninism with capitalism.

July 20, 1969: Apollo 11 Lands on the Moon

The Apollo 11 mission was the first manned mission to land on the Moon. Launched on July 16, 1969, it carried Mission Commander Neil Armstrong, Command Module Pilot Michael Collins and Lunar Module Pilot Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr. On July 20, Armstrong and Aldrin became the first humans to land on the Moon, while Collins orbited above.



October 1970: The October Crisis



The October Crisis was a series of events triggered by the kidnappings in Quebec of British Trade Commissioner James Cross and Quebec Minister of Labour Pierre Laporte by members of the [Front de libération du Québec](#) (FLQ), a radical Quebec separatist group. While Cross would eventually be freed, Laporte was murdered. The circumstances culminated in the only peacetime usage of the [War Measures Act](#) in [Canada's](#) history, instigated on the advice of Prime Minister Pierre

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Trudeau at the request of the Premier of Quebec, Robert Bourassa, and the Mayor of Montréal, Jean Drapeau. The invocation of the Act resulted in widespread deployment of Canadian Forces troops throughout Quebec and in Ottawa. This gave the appearance that martial law had been imposed, although in Quebec the military remained in a support role to the Province's civil authorities. The police were also enabled with far-reaching powers, and they arrested and detained, without bail, 497 individuals, all but 62 of whom were later released without charges.

At the time, opinion polls throughout Canada, including in Quebec, showed widespread support for the use of the War Measures Act. The response later, however, was criticized by a number of prominent leaders, including René Lévesque, Robert Stanfield and Tommy Douglas, who believed the actions to be excessive and the precedent to suspend civil liberties dangerous. This criticism led to the replacement of the War Measures Act by the Emergencies Act in 1988.

The events of October 1970 galvanized support against violence in the cause for Quebec sovereignty and directed the movement toward political means of attaining greater autonomy and independence, including support for the sovereigntist Parti Québécois, which went on to form the provincial government in 1976.

May 26, 1972: SALT I Signed

SALT I, the first series of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, extended from November 1969 to May 1972. During that period, the U.S. and the Soviet Union negotiated the first agreements to place limits and restraints on some of their central and most important armaments. In the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems, they moved to end an emerging competition in defensive systems that threatened to spur offensive competition to still greater heights. In the Interim Agreement on Certain Measures with Respect to the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, the two nations took the first steps to check the rivalry in their most powerful land- and submarine-based offensive nuclear weapons.

October 6–26, 1973: Fourth Arab–Israeli War (The Yom Kippur War)

The Fourth Arab–Israeli War began with a surprise joint attack against Israel by Egypt and Syria on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. Egypt and Syria crossed the ceasefire lines in the Sinai and Golan Heights, respectively, that had been captured by Israel during the Six-Day War in 1967.

The Egyptians and the Syrians advanced during the first two days, after which momentum began to swing in Israel's favour. By the war's second week, the Syrians had been pushed out of the Golan Heights. In the Sinai to the south, the Israelis struck at the seam between two invading Egyptian armies, crossed the Suez Canal (where the old ceasefire line had been), and cut off the Egyptian Third Army just as a UN ceasefire came into effect.

The war had far-reaching implications for many nations. The Arab world, which had been humiliated by the lopsided defeat of the Egyptian–Syrian–Jordanian alliance during the Six-Day War, felt psychologically renewed by its string of victories early in the conflict. This morale boost paved the way for the peace process that soon followed the Camp David

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Accords, which led to normalized relations between Egypt and Israel—the first time any Arab country recognized the Israeli state. Egypt, which had already been drifting away from the Soviet Union, then left the Soviet sphere of influence entirely.

July–August, 1974: Turkish Invasion of Cyprus

A former British colony, Cyprus became an independent republic in 1960 and a member of the Commonwealth in 1961.

In 1974, following years of intercommunal violence between ethnic Greeks and Turks, plus an attempted coup d'état by Greek Cypriot nationalists aimed at annexing the island to Greece and engineered by the military junta then in power in Athens, Turkey invaded and occupied one-third of the island. This led to the displacement of thousands of Cypriots and the establishment of a separate Turkish Cypriot political entity in the north. This event and its resulting political situation are matters of ongoing dispute. For years, Canada provided troops to the UN Peacekeeping Force on Cyprus (UNFICYP).

May 12–15, 1975: The Mayaguez Incident



SS Mayaguez

Less than two weeks after the communist conquest of South Vietnam, forces of the communist Khmer Rouge in Cambodia attacked and seized an American merchant ship, the Mayaguez, and captured the crew. U.S. President Gerald Ford reacted by sending marines to rescue the crew.

The Khmer Rouge released the crew, but not before inflicting casualties on the U.S. rescue force. A total of 41 marines and airmen died, with 50 wounded.

June 25, 1975: Murder of Lord Louis Mountbatten

Lord Louis of Mountbatten, uncle to Prince Charles, who had led the planning for the Dieppe raid, served as the last British Viceroy of India and presided over Indian independence in 1947, was murdered by an Irish Republican Army bomb aboard his boat in Donegal Bay, Ireland.



Lord Louis Mountbatten

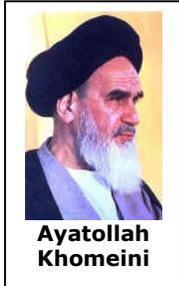
1978–88: Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan was a nine-year conflict involving Soviet forces supporting the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) government against the [mujahadeen](#) resistance. The latter group found support from a variety of sources, including the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and other Muslim countries in the context of the Cold War. This conflict was concurrent with the [1979 Iranian Revolution](#) and the [Iran–Iraq War](#).

Initially, Soviet deployment of the 40th Army in Afghanistan began on August 7, 1978. The final troop withdrawal began on May 15, 1988, and ended on February 15, 1989. Due to the interminable and inconclusive nature of the war, the conflict in Afghanistan has often been referred to as the Soviet equivalent of the U.S. Vietnam War.

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February 11, 1979: Overthrow of Shah of Iran



The first major demonstrations against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi began in January 1978. Between August and December 1978, strikes and demonstrations paralyzed the country. The Shah left Iran for exile in mid-January 1979, and two weeks later Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Tehran and was greeted by several million Iranians. The royal regime collapsed shortly after on February 11, when guerrillas and rebel troops overwhelmed troops loyal to the Shah in armed street fighting. Iran voted by national referendum to become an Islamic Republic on April 1, 1979, and to approve a new [theocratic constitution](#) whereby Khomeini became Supreme Leader of the country in December 1979.

June 18, 1979: SALT II signed

The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) II between the U.S. and the Soviet Union resulted in the first nuclear arms treaty that assumed real reductions in strategic forces to 2250 of all categories of delivery vehicles on both sides.

November 4, 1979: Iran Hostage Crisis

On November 4, 1979, youthful Islamists, calling themselves Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line, invaded the U.S. embassy compound in Tehran and seized its staff.

The holding of the hostages continued for months, even after the death of the Shah. As Khomeini explained to his future President Banisadr, "This action has many benefits. This has united our people. Our opponents do not dare act against us. We can put the constitution to the people's vote without difficulty . . ."

The prestige of Khomeini and the hostage-taking was further enhanced by the failure of a hostage rescue attempt by the U.S., which resulted in the destruction of two aircraft and the deaths of eight American servicemen and one Iranian civilian. The hostages were finally released in January 1981, although six had escaped their captors during the initial riot and fled Iran with the intervention of Canadian ambassador to Iran Ken Taylor.

1980-82: Iran-Iraq War

In September 1980, the Arab Nationalist and Sunni Muslim-dominated regime of Saddam Hussein in neighbouring Iraq invaded Iran in an attempt to take advantage of the revolutionary chaos and destroy the revolution in its infancy. Iran was galvanized, and Iranians rallied behind their new government to help stop and then reverse the Iraqi advance. By early 1982, Iran regained almost all the territory lost to the invasion.

April-June, 1982: The Falklands War

The Falklands War started on April 2, 1982, with the Argentine invasion and occupation of the Falkland Islands and South Georgia, and ended with the Argentine surrender on June

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14, 1982. The war lasted 74 days, with 255 British and 649 Argentine soldiers, sailors, airmen and three civilian Falklanders killed.

The conflict was the result of a protracted diplomatic confrontation regarding the sovereignty of the islands. Neither state officially declared war and the fighting was largely limited to the territories under dispute and the South Atlantic. The initial invasion was considered by Argentina as the reoccupation of its own territory, and by the United Kingdom as a foreign invasion of a British overseas territory.

Britain launched a naval task force to engage the Argentine Navy and Air Force, and to retake the islands by amphibious assault. The British eventually prevailed and the islands remained under British control. However, as of 2008 and as it has since the 19th century, Argentina shows no sign of relinquishing its claim. The claim remained in the Argentine constitution after its reformation in 1994.

September 1, 1983: KAL Flight 007 Shot Down

Korean Air Lines Flight 007 (KAL 007) was a Korean Air Lines civilian airliner that was shot down by Soviet jet interceptors on September 1, 1983, over the Sea of Japan when it strayed by navigational error into prohibited Soviet airspace. All 269 passengers and crew aboard were killed. The aircraft was en route from New York City via Anchorage to Seoul.

The Soviet Union initially denied knowledge of the incident but later admitted shooting the aircraft down, claiming that it was on a spy mission. The Politburo believed it was a deliberate provocation by the U.S. to test the Soviet Union's military preparedness, or even to provoke a war. The U.S. accused the Soviet Union of obstructing search and rescue operations. Furthermore, the Soviet military suppressed evidence sought by the [International Civil Aviation Organization](#) investigation, notably the flight data recorders, which were eventually released nine years later after a change of government.

The incident was one of most tense moments of the Cold War and resulted in an escalation of anti-Soviet sentiment, particularly in the U.S.

October 25, 1983: U.S. Invasion of Grenada

After an internal power struggle on the island of just over 100,000 people, which ended with the deposition and execution of Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, the invasion began on October 25, 1983. A combined force from the U.S. (nearly 10,000 troops), Jamaica and members of the [Regional Security System](#) (approximately 300 troops) defeated Grenadian resistance, and the military government of Hudson Austin was deposed.

The invasion was strongly criticized by the United Kingdom, Canada and the United Nations General Assembly, which condemned it as "*a flagrant violation of international law*". It enjoyed broad public support in the U.S. as well as among segments of the people of Grenada. October 25 is now a national holiday in Grenada, called Thanksgiving Day, to commemorate this event.

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1985: Mikhael Gorbachev Becomes General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

Mikhael Sergeyeovich Gorbachev (born March 2, 1931) was the last General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, serving from 1985 until 1991, and also the last head of state of the USSR, serving from 1988 until its collapse in 1991. He was the only Soviet leader to have been born after the [October Revolution](#) of 1917.

Gorbachev's attempts at reform, as well as summit conferences with U.S. President Ronald Reagan, contributed to the end of the Cold War, ended the political supremacy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He was awarded the [Nobel Peace Prize](#) in 1990.



October 6, 1986: K-219 Sunk in the Atlantic

The Soviet Yankee-Class ballistic missile submarine K-219 was scuttled by her captain after attempts to repair damage caused by an onboard fire had failed. Failure to scuttle the submarine could have led to a catastrophic explosion of the nuclear missiles only a few miles off the U.S. east coast.

May 17, 1987: USS Stark Struck by Missile

The U.S. Navy frigate USS Stark was struck and damaged by an Iraqi Exocet missile while on patrol in the Persian Gulf.



July 3, 1988: Iranian Airliner Shot Down by USS Vincennes

The U.S. Navy cruiser USS Vincennes shot down an Iranian airliner over the Persian Gulf after mistakenly identifying it as an incoming hostile aircraft. All 290 persons aboard the airliner were killed.

July 4, 1989: Libyan Fighter Jets Shot Down by U.S. Navy

Two Libyan MIG 23 "Floggers" displaying hostile intentions were shot down over international waters in the Mediterranean by F-14 fighters operating from the USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67).

1989–91: The Revolutions of 1989

The Revolutions of 1989 were a revolutionary wave that swept across Central and Eastern Europe in late 1989, ending in the overthrow of Soviet-style communist states within the space of a few months.

The largely bloodless political upheaval began in Poland, continued in Hungary, and then led to a surge of mostly peaceful revolutions in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria.

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Romania was the only Eastern-bloc country to overthrow its communist regime violently and execute its head of state.

The Revolutions of 1989 greatly altered the balance of power in the world and marked (together with the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union) the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Post-Cold War era.

October 3, 1990: Fall of the Berlin Wall / German Reunification

When the East German government announced on November 9, 1989, after several weeks of civil unrest, that all GDR citizens could visit West Germany and West Berlin, crowds of East Germans climbed onto and crossed the wall, joined by West Germans on the other side in a celebratory atmosphere. Over the next few weeks, parts of the wall were chipped away by a euphoric public and by souvenir hunters. Industrial equipment was later used to remove almost all the rest.

The fall of the Berlin Wall paved the way for [German reunification](#), which was formally concluded on October 3, 1990.

The fall of the wall is symbolically represented near the exit of Gallery 4.

On **February 7, 1990**, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union agreed to give up its monopoly of power. Over the next several weeks, the 15 constituent republics of the USSR held their first competitive elections. Reformers and ethnic nationalists won many of the seats.

The constituent republics began to assert their national sovereignty and started a "war of laws" with the central government, wherein the governments of the constituent republics repudiated union-wide legislation where it conflicted with local laws, asserted control over their local economies and refused to pay tax revenue to the central Moscow government. This caused the Soviet economy to decline further.

The pro-independence movement in the Lithuanian SSR prompted a visit by Gorbachev in January 1990 to the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, which provoked a pro-independence rally of approximately 250,000 people.

On **March 11, 1990**, the Lithuanian SSR, led by Chairman of the Supreme Council Vytautas Landsbergis, declared restoration of independence. However, the Soviet Army attempted to suppress the movement. The Soviet Union initiated an economic blockade of Lithuania and kept troops there "to secure the rights of ethnic Russians."

On **March 30, 1990**, the Estonian Supreme Council declared Soviet power in the Estonian SSR since 1940 to have been illegal, and started a process to re-establish Estonia as an independent state. The process of restoration of independence of the Latvian SSR began on **May 4, 1990**, with a Latvian Supreme Council vote stipulating a transitional period to complete independence.

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On **January 13, 1991**, Soviet troops stormed the TV Tower in Vilnius, Lithuania, to suppress the nationalist media. This ended with 14 unarmed civilians dead and hundreds more injured. Later that month in Georgian SSR, anti-Soviet protesters in Tbilisi demonstrated support for Lithuanian independence.

On **March 17, 1991**, in a Union-wide referendum, 76.4% of all voters voted for the retention of the Soviet Union in a reformed form. The Baltics, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova boycotted the referendum. In each of the other nine republics, a majority of the voters supported the retention of the renewed Soviet Union.

On **June 12, 1991**, Boris Yeltsin won 57% of the popular vote in the democratic elections for the post of president of the Russian SFSR, defeating Gorbachev's preferred candidate, Nikolai Ryzhkov. Yeltsin took office on July 10, 1991.



The final round of the Soviet Union collapse took place following the Ukrainian popular referendum on **December 1, 1991**, wherein 90% of voters opted for independence. The leaders of the Slavic republics agreed to meet for a discussion of possible forms of relationship, alternative to Gorbachev's struggle for a union.

July 1, 1991: Dissolution of Warsaw Pact

The Warsaw Pact was officially dissolved at a meeting in Prague on July 1, 1991.

On **December 8, 1991**, the leaders of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian republics met and signed the [Belavezha Accords](#), declaring the Soviet Union dissolved and replacing it with the [Commonwealth of Independent States](#) (CIS). Gorbachev described this as an unconstitutional coup.

On **December 12, 1991**, Russia's secession from the Union was sealed, with the Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian SFSR formally ratifying the Belavezha Accords and denouncing the 1922 Treaty on the creation of the Soviet Union.

On **December 17, 1991**, alongside 28 European countries, the European Community and 4 non-European countries, 12 of the 15 Soviet republics signed the [European Energy Charter](#) in the Hague as sovereign states.

Doubts remained over the authority of the Belavezha Accords to affect the dissolution of the Soviet Union, since they were signed by only five of the Soviet Republics. However, on **December 21, 1991**, representatives of all member republics except Georgia signed the [Alma-Ata Protocol](#), in which they confirmed the dissolution of the Union. That same day, all former-Soviet republics agreed to join the CIS, with the exception of the three Baltic States.

On **December 24, 1991**, the Soviet Ambassador to the UN delivered to the Secretary General a letter from Russian President Boris Yeltsin, informing him that Russia was the successor state to the USSR for the purposes of UN membership. After being circulated among the other UN member states with no objection raised, the statement was declared accepted on December 31.

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On **December 25, 1991**, Gorbachev resigned as President of the USSR, declaring the office extinct and ceding all the powers still vested in it to the President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin. On the night of that same day, the Soviet flag was lowered for the last time over the Kremlin. Finally, a day later on **December 26, 1991**, the Council of Republics of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR recognized the dissolution of the Soviet Union and dissolved itself. By **December 31, 1991**, all official Soviet institutions had ceased operations as individual republics assumed the central government's role.

December 31, 1991: Dissolution of the USSR; End of the Cold War.