

## **The Cold War as it Progressed**

### **America's Economy Grew Much Stronger than the Soviet's**



As the Cold War progressed, the capitalist system of America and the West dramatically out-performed the "central planning" of the communist economies.

The US could develop and afford superior military technology and deploy those weapons and well-trained soldiers at strategic locations around the world. Meantime, the Soviet Union -- whose communist economic system didn't work -- was falling farther and farther behind. The Soviet side could produce neither cutting-edge weapons nor consumer goods.

With mass communication improving, more and more residents of the communist nations realized their system was failing. This was especially evident in some of the Soviet Union's communist allies and Warsaw Pact military allies, such as Poland, where opposition to Moscow's control grew.

### **The Disastrous Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan**



US Marines Practice with Stinger Missile

Another significant factor in the end of the Cold War was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Soviet Union would pay a growing cost in lives and money over the next decade. America supported the Afghan resistance, often called "Mujahideen," or freedom fighters. One of the most important weapons supplied by the US was the Stinger anti-aircraft missile, which downed many Soviet aircraft and prevented the Soviets from maximizing their air superiority.

Because of the damage to the Soviet Union's reputation and resources, Afghanistan has been called the "Soviet Union's Vietnam," or the "Bear Trap," (after the bear symbol of the USSR).

[Ironically, some Islamist extremists who opposed the Soviets during the Cold War and were on the same side as the US, including Osama Bin Laden, later joined al-Qaeda and participated in terrorist attacks against America and Western interests. The US itself invaded Afghanistan after 9/11.]

**"Mr. Gorbachev,  
Tear Down this Wall!"**



In June 1987, President Ronald Reagan visited Berlin and issued a challenge to the Soviet Union. "There is one sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable,

that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace,” he said, sending a message to the new head of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. “General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization, come here to this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”

President Reagan was also increasing America's military spending and supporting fighters battling Soviet occupiers in Afghanistan. Gorbachev, realizing his country could not keep going as before, started to make changes.

### **By 1989 It Was Clear the Soviet Union Was Close to the End**



East Germans began demonstrating and escaping. When the communists tried to keep some control by relaxing restrictions, the demonstrations grew even larger until crowds starting pulling down the wall. In the past, East German authorities would have responded by shooting. But now, they gave up. East and West Germany were soon unified, becoming one country again under a democratic, pro-U.S. government.



After the wall fell, the Soviet Union itself followed soon after. It was officially dissolved in December 1991, creating the Russian Federation and, in effect, freeing most of the various countries forced in the Soviet Union.

America and its allies had won the Cold War.

Legacy of the Cold War



The Cold War left a complicated inheritance to people today. Because of the conflict, the world still has a large supply of nuclear weapons and other terrible armaments. Many countries were left with debts and environmental damage. China remains a dictatorship and Russia and the United States often disagree on important issues. Korea remains separated and the people in the North, the communist side, are treated brutally by their government. Many American families, and those in other countries, lost loved ones. Some American soldiers have never come home (see [www.kpows.com](http://www.kpows.com)).

On the other hand, America and its allies were able to prevail without another World War. That allowed people across the world to have freedom and the right to help determine their own futures. For many people, the costs of the Cold War were high, but worth it in the end.

From: [www.coldwar.me](http://www.coldwar.me)