

Berlin Wall, 1989

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Introduction

The Berlin Wall, built in 1961, became a symbol of the Cold War, dividing East and West Berlin. Its construction prevented the people of East Germany from leaving Communist rule and defecting to the West. For almost three decades, it fractured families, restricted movement, and showed the struggles for power between democracy and communism. Social, civil, and economic unrest and confusion on travel restrictions finally caused the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989.



10 November 1989, doing something unimaginable the day before. Is it a cause for celebration or panic? The start of a new world or the collapse of one?

This simulation features the members of the US National Security Council navigating the extraordinary events of the fall of the Berlin Wall, events that could lead to the collapse of Communist governments and the spread of democracy, or potentially even start World War Three.

Delegates play the major American political leaders and other experts in the US National Security Council. They must address the immediate aftermath of the Berlin Wall's fall: instability, reunification challenges, political and social responses, and the future of Germany and the larger world. Questions on communism vs democracy, the Cold War, and security are also critical in this committee. Creativity and diplomacy will be key while balancing national interests, ideology and global reactions.

The United States played a central role in shaping both the symbolic and strategic perceptions of the Berlin Wall's history. The Berlin Wall was not only a German or European issue, but also a defining front in the global Cold War struggle. It was the most visible symbol of division in the Cold War, intensifying the arms race between the Western NATO alliance and the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact states.

Background

The Berlin Wall was built practically overnight on 13 August 1961, by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) under Soviet direction (The Editors, 2025). This followed the defection of thousands of East Germans in the months leading up to the construction, causing Premier Nikita Khrushchev, the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to give the command to build the wall.

The Wall itself began with barbed wire, guards, and cinder blocks, later replaced by concrete, eventually standing at about 11.8 feet tall. The Berlin Wall was fortified with guard towers, searchlights, and the "death strip," or a wide-open area of sand and gravel aptly named

for how many people who died trying to cross (TIME, 1961). Border guards had “shoot-to-kill” allowances that were rewarded with commendations or bonuses (Berlin 2017).



Waiting for World War Three to start at Check Point Charlie, on the Western side, just before the Wall was built, 1961.

There were a few clearance areas, or checkpoints, that you were able to cross with proper documentation and permission. The most famous of which was located in the center of Berlin, named “Checkpoint Charlie” (Gilbert 2023). The Berlin Wall was not meant to just keep West Berliners out, but rather keep East Berliners trapped in.



A failed escape from East Germany

Lost life and escapees: Despite the illegality of leaving, that did not stop people from trying.

The very first person to cross the Berlin Wall was an East German Border guard, Konrad Schumann, who realized the impending situation and jumped the barbed wire to West Berlin on the third day of the construction. His jump was immortalized in a photograph later called the “Leap of Freedom” (Karacs, 1998). After construction was finished, security and deterrence made crossing a lot more difficult. One young East Berliner, Peter Fechter, attempted to cross in 1962, but was shot and left to bleed to death in front of Western media. The 18-year-old bricklayer became a tragic symbol of the brutality of the Wall (Guardian Staff 2014).

The last person to successfully escape from East Germany before the fall of the Wall was Mario Wächtler, who escaped on September 2, 1989, just a month before it came down (Paterson 2014). Around 140 people were killed or died at the Berlin Wall itself, but over 600 were shot and killed by GDR border guards or died in other ways during escape attempts (Berlin 2017). Around 5,000 people successfully escaped across the Berlin Wall (Phillips 2018), and over 100,000 citizens in all of East Germany tried to escape across the inner-German border in the nearly three-decade span that the Wall was up (Berlin 2017).

Fall of the Berlin Wall: By the late 1980s, pressure was mounting. Mikhail Gorbachev’s policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) had loosened Soviet control (BBC, 2019). Both a slow economy and growing civil unrest fueled anti-communist movements. In East Germany, mass protests erupted in cities such as Leipzig, Dresden, and Berlin. Dissent was also growing throughout the rest of Europe, with Hungary opening border restrictions to Austria and allowing East German refugees into the country (BBC, 2019).

On 9 November 1989, a botched East German press conference on new travel regulations triggered chaos at Berlin’s checkpoints. Günter Schabowski, a member of the communist party, announced that the new travel laws were to take immediate effect until

new travel regulations were passed into law (Nelsson, 2019). Thousands of East Berliners flooded to the Wall, overwhelming border guards who, also confused, opened the gates. Crowds began dismantling the Wall, piece by piece. The defining structure of the Cold War was smashed and destroyed (Nelsson, 2019). The Berlin Wall fell, beginning the process of German reunification.



The border between East and West Germany, from 1945 to...

U.S. influence: During this time, U.S. presidents played symbolic and strategic roles in shaping global perception of Berlin and the Wall. John F. Kennedy reinforced U.S. commitment to West Berlin during his 1963 visit, famously declaring “Ich bin ein Berliner” as a show of solidarity against the Soviet Union’s new pressure (Kirpalani, 2009). In 1987, Ronald Reagan heightened Cold War rhetoric by urging Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to embrace reform and “tear down this wall,” which became a powerful moment that showed U.S. support for

East Berlin (Kirpalani, 2009). In 1989, during the Wall’s collapse, George H. W. Bush responded cautiously, balancing the celebration of German unity with the danger of potential backlash (Fraga 2018).

Current situation

At ODUMUNC 49, it is the day after 9 November 1989. The Wall has fallen. East and West Berliners are able to climb the wall, although East German police make sure they cannot cross freely yet. The East German state authority is collapsing rapidly, and Soviet reaction remains uncertain. The Warsaw Pact faces unprecedented instability: Poland and Hungary have already begun democratic reforms; Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria may be next (BBC, 2019). The ripple effects could redraw Europe’s geopolitical map within months.

The U.S. National Security Council must take advantage of this event while navigating its precarious nature. The United States is hoping for the possibility of a reunified Germany within NATO, the peaceful collapse of communist regimes, and the spread of democratic governance across Europe; however, there is still risk of a violent Soviet crackdown, instability in Eastern Europe, nationalist uprisings, refugee crises, and continuing Cold War insecurities with unpredictable nuclear command situations in Warsaw Pact states. This is a national security risk for the U.S. as they are preparing for the fallout and possible retaliation of the Soviet Union, especially considering the ongoing Cold War.

Even with the fall of the Berlin Wall highlighting a weakened Soviet Union under Gorbachev’s rule, the danger is not yet over. The Soviets still command a vast nuclear arsenal, maintain military presence in Eastern Europe, and may still use their sphere of influence to turn things around. The biggest concern for the U.S. is avoiding military confrontation and nuclear war with the Soviet Union while balancing its support for democracy. The East German

government still retains its legitimacy and power even without the Wall to prevent East Berliners from fleeing. West Germany, under Chancellor Helmut Kohl, is already drafting a potential reunification framework, something that the Soviets could view as a direct threat (Deutsche Welle, 2010). Tensions are high, and this moment could even spark World War III (Reuters, 2009).

Complicating everything the United does through the crisis are other events elsewhere. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and decision to deploy a massive UN-mandated force to push his Iraqi forces out was more than a mere distraction. Simultaneously, Yugoslavia will disintegrate into ethnic civil war, eventually emerging has seven separate countries, setting a precedent for every war of ethnic violence, national collapse and global response thereafter.

The Body

The ODUMUNC Crisis Simulation body is the U.S. National Security Council, a White Committee chaired by the President, advised by high officials who are Members of the NSC, other senior officials invited, and NSC staff.

The simulation opens the day after the fall, 10 November 1989, with the world still reeling from the news. The U.S. National Security Council urgently convenes in Washington, D.C., providing new grounds for debate on America's role in spreading democracy and navigating this shocking event. The rapid change of pace offers both an extraordinary opportunity and a grave risk.

The ODUMUNC Crisis Simulation body must decide how to respond to the opportunities and risks involved as the National Security Council, potentially changing the future of German reunification, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War. The world is looking to America for its reaction to this new turn of events and what the National Security Council will do next. The next few moves will determine whether confrontation with the Soviet Union can be avoided, World War Three can be averted, and

what will be the outlines of future world order.

Crisis Characters



George H. W. Bush: President of the United States

The 41st president of the United States, 1989-93, George Herbert Walker Bush came to office with the most impressive diplomatic and national security resume of any president since Eisenhower. He served as Ambassador to the United Nations, Ambassador to China, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and Vice-President for eight years under President Ronald Reagan, 1981-89. Unlike Reagan, he downplayed long-term vision and transformation of world order. He emphasized caution and careful management in foreign affairs. He considered his greatest successes to be *crises averted*, his preference to crises resolved.

In this ODUMUNC simulation, President Bush, 1989-93, always is George H.W. Bush, to distinguish him from his son, George W. Bush, President 2001-09.



Dan Quayle: Vice-President

Vice-President 1989-93 under President George H. W. Bush, Quayle previously he served Indiana in the U.S. House of Representatives 1977-81 and the U.S. Senate 1981-89. Quayle had a reputation for controversial spontaneous remarks that sometimes made sense, sometimes didn't. In the media he was routinely presented as somebody unprepared for the responsibilities of higher office. Inside the White House he was valued as a source of ideas with a populist connection to conservative, main street public opinion. In a notoriously internationally focused administration, he was closest to American public opinion, except sometimes for the Secretary of State Baker.



James Baker: Secretary of State

James Baker was an accomplished political insider and manager, presidential campaign

manager for President Bush. In the Reagan Administration he served as Treasury Secretary and White House Chief of Staff. As Secretary of State under Bush, he had a reputation as a fixer, with a strong tactical sense of how to manage problems and avoid crises. He was less of a visionary national security strategist planning the future of American foreign policy or world order after the Cold War. Baker usually was the public foreign policy voice of the administration.



Dick Cheney: Secretary of Defense

Richard Cheney was the 17th United States Secretary of Defense under George H. W. Bush and later served as the 46th vice president of the United States from 2001 to 2009 under President George W. Bush. He provided military assessments and options. He oversaw U.S. forces in Europe and can coordinate military readiness in light of German developments. A classical Republican hard-liner, a self-made price of darkness, in the spirit of President Nixon, he is a classic worst-case thinker, suspicious of Soviet intentions and suspicious of compromise as a way to achieve goals.



Vernon Walters: Ambassador to West Germany

Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters was a United States Army officer and a diplomat. A gifted in-between liaison, he had a remarkable ability to present American priorities while understanding the goals of his foreign counterparts. He served from 1972-76 as Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, from 1985-89 as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, and in 1989-91 as Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany during the decisive phase of German Reunification.

Fluent in German and Russia, with a reputation as a listener and subtle advocate of his country's goals, he is an ideal high-level intermediary. 'Walters... spent five decades fulfilling the fantasies of the world's diplomatic conspiracy theorists. Without his repeated arrival in the right place at the wrong time, they would have been left with neither straw nor bricks for their elaborate conceits. His burly

figure could usually be spotted anywhere that required a firm American finger to stir the international pot.'¹



Thomas Pickering: Ambassador to the United Nations

A career Foreign Service officer, Pickering is recognized as perhaps the most talented diplomat America produced in the second half of the Cold War. Under President Bush, Pickering served as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, 1989-92, where he was responsible for understanding global perspectives on the rapidly changing situation and ensuring the UN Security Council especially served American interests, or at least did not get in the way.

Although the positions and work he is most famous for came after the Bush Administration, his reputation during the end of the Cold War was no less vital. A serious-minded person, colleagues sometimes found him humorless.²

¹ Harold Jackson, 'Lieutenant General Vernon Walters', *Guardian*, 18 February 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2002/feb/18/guardianobituaries.haroldjackson>

² Paul Lewis, Paul, 'Mideast Tensions: U.S. Envoy to U.N. on Center Stage', *New York Times*, 10 November 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/10/world/mideast-tensions-us-envoy-to-un-on-center-stage.html>



Judge William Webster: Director of Central Intelligence

After establishing his reputation as a federal judge in Missouri, Webster was appointed Director of the FBI, 1978-87, then in 1987 Director of the CIA. He is the only person to have held both positions. Always the model of integrity and good judgment, he restored both agencies' reputations, after years of controversy under less disciplined leaders, as servants of the national interest and rule of law.

This conviction will lead him into conflict with agency old-timers. 'He faced fierce resistance from the old guard, always wary of outsiders', said an observer, 'All of his training as a lawyer and a judge was that you didn't do illegal things.'³

³ Tim Weiner, 'William H. Webster, Who Ran Both the F.B.I. and the C.I.A., Dies at 101', *New York Times*, 8 August 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/08/us/william-h-webster-dead.html>



Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft: National Security Advisor

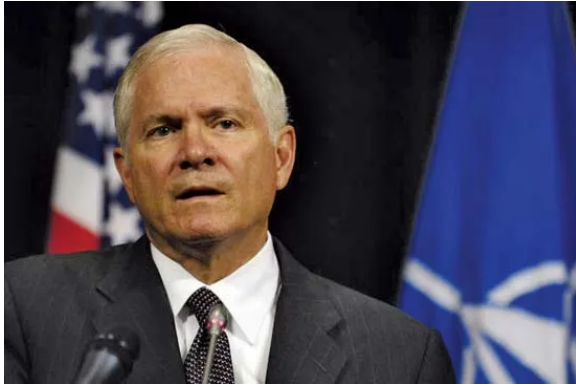
Scowcroft has the reputation as America's greatest National Security Advisor ever. Not a diplomat in the style of Henry Kissinger, or a crusader like John Bolton, he was a gifted organizer. Scowcroft worked to ensure all agencies of the U.S. government worked systematically toward a shared vision of American strategic goals. His approach is strengthened by his close personal friendship with President Bush.

Although he acted with gentle reserve, he could have strong convictions and was willing to upset or at least surprise his colleagues across the government as a careful, passionate advocate. He has a strong sense of when to push, and when to stop, when to demand and when to concede.⁴

After a career in the U.S. Air Force, officer and a two-time United States National Security Advisor, first under U.S. President Gerald Ford and then under George H. W. Bush. and advised President Barack Obama on choosing his national security team. He was the principal adviser on national security and foreign policy, overseeing the National Security Council. In this role, he translated President Bush's vision of how to manage the crisis into policy to guide the

⁴ Jeffrey Goldberg, 'Breaking ranks', *New Yorker*, 23 October 2025, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/10/31/breaking-ranks>

rest of the federal government, the nation's intelligence agencies, diplomats, financial institutions and armed forces.⁵



Robert Gates: Deputy National Security Advisor

Robert Gates rose through the ranks during a career in the CIA to become Deputy Director, 1986-89, then Deputy National Security Advisor 1989-91 and Director of Central Intelligence (chief of the agency), 1991-93. Not surprisingly, he won a reputation as the ultimate intelligence insider. became director of central intelligence under President George H. W. Bush from 1991 to 1993.

Later in his career, he became an advocate of caution in matters of national security. 'He'll be remembered for making us aware of the danger of over-reliance on military intervention as an instrument of American foreign policy,' said former Senator David L. Boren. But while rising through the ranks in the 1980s and early '90s, he was not inhibited about spy craft and the use of force.⁶

⁵ 'Longtime Public Servant Brent Scowcroft Dies', Texas A&M University, 7 August 2020, <https://stories.tamu.edu/news/2020/08/07/longtime-public-servant-brent-scowcroft-dies/>



Carla Hills: Trade Representative

Because all bi-lateral relations include major issues of international commerce and trade, the U.S. Trade Representative is a prominent figure in efforts to improve and strengthen American-Soviet relations. Then, as now, the overwhelming issue for the United States and Western countries was Soviet oil and gas exports. Did cheap Soviet fossil fuels serve Western interests or undermine Western solidarity? Was it a temptation or a provocation? This dilemma pushed her to negotiate with Western Europe and Japan just as much as with Moscow.

Head of foreign trade policies, Carla Hills is an American lawyer and former government official. A member of the Republican Party, she previously served as the 5th United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development under President Gerald Ford from 1975 to 1977 and as the 10th United States Trade Representative under President George H. W.

⁶ 'Looking back, Gates says he's grown wary of wars of choice', *New York Times*. 18 June 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/19/us/politics/19gates.html?_r=1&hpw=&pagewanted=all

Bush from 1989 to 1993. Hills was the first woman to hold each of those posts, the third woman to serve in a presidential cabinet, and the first appointed to both cabinet and cabinet-rank positions.



Colin Powell: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

With strong combat credentials from service in Vietnam, he emerged in the 1970s and '80s as a Pentagon staff officer with strong political sense. As America's most visible Black military officer, he was the first in virtually everything he did. Powell became National Security Advisor under President Reagan 1987-89, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), military commander of the U.S. armed Forces, 1989-93 under George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. Later, he was U.S. Secretary of State, 2001-05.⁷

⁷ Harold Jackson, 'Colin Powell obituary', *Guardian*, 18 October 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/18/colin-powell-obituary>

⁸ Harry Kreisler, 'Conversation with Jack Matlock - The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the End of the

If war breaks out in Germany, Powell will lead it.



Jack Matlock Jr.: Ambassador to the Soviet Union

America's man in Moscow is Amb. Jack Matlock Jr., a career Foreign Service Officer, teacher, historian, and linguist. He was a specialist in Soviet affairs throughout during some of the most tumultuous years of the Cold War.

Matlock became captivated by Russia having read Dostoyevsky as an undergraduate. In the 1950s the Soviet Union was a closed society, so he decided his best know Russia was to join the Foreign Service. His ultimate career goal was clear from the beginning, '...when I entered the Foreign Service I shocked a lot of people by what seemed to be overweening ambition when I was asked "What do you want out of the Foreign Service?" I stated frankly, "I want to be the American ambassador to the Soviet Union."⁸

Cold War: A Diplomat Looks Back', University of California, Berkeley, 13 February 1997, <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/conversations/Matlock/matlock-con1.html>

Matlock is the Bush Administrations most prominent reporter from the Soviet Union, best informed on the ideas of the Soviet leadership and Soviet people. Matlock himself emphasizes peaceful solutions beneficial to both sides, to reduce conflict and solve problems peacefully.



Richard Barkley: Ambassador to East Germany

Richard Clark Barkley was a United States diplomat and America's last Ambassador to East Germany, the German Democratic Republic or GDR. Barkley was responsible for America's role in the most sensitive place on Earth, the country where the Soviet Red Army still had an enormous presence including a large supply of nuclear weapons. If the end of the Cold War went wrong, it could easily lead to a hot war in East and West Germany.⁹ Decisions made in East Berlin will have enormous implications for everyone.

⁹ 'Interview with Ambassador Richard C. Barkley', *Library of Congress*, 12 May 2003, <https://tile.loc.gov/storage->



Condoleezza Rice (Condi), National Security Council Director for the Soviet Union

Best known for her work after the Bush Administration, when she later became Secretary of State, Rice emerged as a political scientist at the University of Denver and Stanford University, with personal expertise on Communist Czechoslovakia. With support from Bret Scowcroft, Rice found a place in the George H.W. Bush Administration's National Security as Director for Soviet Union affairs. In this role she will do the staff work on all major Presidential deliberations and decisions, reviewing and recommending options within the US Government and dealing the Soviet Union. President George H. W. Bush reportedly was 'captivated' by Rice, and relied heavily on her advice in his dealings with Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin.¹⁰

services/service/mss/mfdip/2007/2007bar03/2007bar03.pdf

¹⁰ Russell Baker, 'Condi and the boys', *New York Review of Books*. Vol. 55, No. 5, 3 April 2008,



***Philip Zelikow, National Security Council
Director for Germany***

A political scientist, Zelikow became a Foreign Service Officer in the 1980s. In 1989, in the George H. W. Bush administration, Zelikow was detailed to the National Security Council, where he was involved as a senior White House staffer in the diplomacy surrounding the German reunification and the diplomatic settlements accompanying the end of the Cold War in Europe. During the first Gulf War, he aided President Bush, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, and Secretary of State James Baker in diplomatic affairs related to the coalition.¹¹

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/04/03/condi-and-the-boys/>

¹¹ Condoleezza Rice and Philip Zelikow, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*. Harvard University Press, 1995



Berlin Wall, 1989



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Berlin Wall, 1989



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