A consensus for a specific beginning for the start of the Cold War is difficult to come by. Some historians point to a letter written by President Harry Truman in early January 1946 in which he said, “Unless Russia is faced with an iron fist and strong language, another war is in the making ... I’m tired of babying the Soviets.” Still others vote for Winston Churchill’s warning in March 1946 that an “iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”

It is also reasonable to push back the beginning of the Cold War to the middle of World War II when the Soviets were allied with the West against Adolph Hitler and Germany. While that war was still in progress, Stalin’s Soviet Union was recruiting spies to steal U.S. atomic secrets.

It seems astonishing on the face of it that allies would spy on one another in wartime, but for Stalin, nothing was as important as security and protection for Russia. Territory was security for Stalin as well as control over territory that was owned by someone else. A common term used in Cold War Studies is Russia’s “sphere-of-influence” in relationship to Central and Eastern Europe. The Russians themselves often refer to these countries as the “near-abroad.”

The Cold War is an excellent example of what is known as an “Us” versus “Them” situation. The end of World War II left a power vacuum in Europe and the Russians rushed to fill it as best they could. Their concern that Russia should always come first and be first in any political situation was, more times than not, an underlying cause of the conflicts, misunderstandings and regional wars that populate the history of the Cold War.

In an odd way the Cold War could also be referred to as the Cold Peace, in the sense that the United States and the Soviet Union, the two superpowers left standing at the end of World War II, never directly attacked each other. Sometimes one or the other was directly involved in fighting, i.e., the United States in Korea and the Soviets in Afghanistan, but in spite of some remarkably vitriolic rhetoric at times, there were no mutually direct attacks and there was no World War III.

Just as there is no consensus as to the beginning of the Cold War, neither is there consensus as to its end. For many, the fall of the Berlin Wall was an emotional closing of the circle that began with one of the first Cold War confrontations, the Soviet blockade of Berlin to which the Allies responded with the remarkable Berlin Airlift, supplying for 15 months nearly everything more than 2,000,000 people needed to survive. Others point to the November 1990 pan-European Summit in Paris as a formal ending to the Cold War, or the 1991 break-up of the Soviet Union, or the Polish elections of 1989, the first free elections held in a country formerly part of the Soviet “sphere-of-influence.”

Whatever the specific “final” event, the Cold War is fast becoming a subject for history classes. Both the structure of the world and the structure of conflict have changed. The new threat to world stability now comes from non-state actors for whom borders mean little, i.e., the Taliban, Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. The next “Us” versus “Them” situation could be just around the corner.
The Cold War

The Berlin Airlift and the "Candy Bombers"

At the end of World War II the Russians moved quickly to dominate Central and Eastern Europe. It soon became obvious that regardless of what Stalin had agreed to, his plan was to control Berlin.

Though the London Protocols of 1944 divided both Germany and Berlin into sectors, the Russians were in de facto control of the whole city of Berlin. American troops were repeatedly stopped by the Russian Army from getting to the city and it was not until July 1 that the U.S. actually entered Berlin. The Americans expected rubble and ruined buildings. The Americans did not expect that the Soviets had stripped the city of pretty much anything of value and sent it back to Russia. The Soviets had turned from an ally into an enemy.

Three events convinced Stalin that harassment was not enough to drive the Allies out of Berlin:

- The Truman Doctrine of supporting "free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation" was announced in March 1947.
- The Marshall Plan of European economic aid was established in April 1948.
- The Western Allies unilaterally declared currency reform in June 1948.

Currency was a huge problem for the Allies. The Russians printed the money and refused any type of reform which weakened their control. The Allies solved the problem by simply announcing that on June 20, 1948 a new Deutschmark would be the official currency for the Western Zones.

Stalin was furious and the Russians began to close down access to Berlin. Barge traffic was stopped. Allied trains were turned around and roads were closed for "construction." By the morning of June 24, the blockade was fully in place. U.S. Army General Lucius Clay was Military Governor of Germany and used his authority to order an airlift of food and supplies which began on June 26. On paper, that looked like a very risky decision. The U.S. garrison in Berlin was only about 6,500 men at the time and could easily have been overrun by the Soviets.

U.S. Army Lt. Gail Halvorsen, a pilot from Utah, began talking to German children who had come to the Tempelhof airport fence to watch the planes and gave the children a few sticks of gum he had in his pocket. He was so touched by their gratitude that he bought more candy and used handkerchiefs as miniature parachutes. On Halvorsen's next flight to Berlin the men pushed the candy parachutes out of the plane. The men continued to drop candy until a German newspaper published a story and Halvorsen was called on the carpet by his Colonel.

The Colonel's boss, however, thought it was a great idea and once the story broke in the American press, packages of handkerchiefs and candy began to arrive from the U.S. Other pilots began dropping candy as well and the entire airlift earned the nickname "Candy Bombers."

The Soviets admitted defeat by stopping the blockade in early May 1949, but just to make sure, the Allies continued the flights for another four months. While Berliners were able to secure some items from the surrounding countryside, the "Candy Bombers" were their primary support during the blockade. The amount of supplies flown to Berlin totaled 2,325,508.6 tons.
Long a strategic interest of its more powerful neighbors, Korea had not contested its own destiny since the early years of the 20th century. In 1905, Korea became a Japanese Protectorate and five years later, Korea was formally annexed by Japan. The occupation years, especially once World War II was declared, were not kind ones for Korea. Eventually all school lessons were taught in Japanese, much of Korea’s agricultural output went to feed the Japanese mainland, and thousands of men were sent to Japan, either as forced laborers or as conscripts for the Japanese Army.

The occupation ended abruptly with Japan’s defeat. About a week before Japan surrendered in 1945, the U.S.S.R. declared war against Japan and sent troops into North Korea. At the same time the Americans unilaterally decided that the 38th Parallel would be the “temporary” post-war dividing line between the two Koreas. Stalin agreed at the time, though the Koreans were never consulted. The occupation ended abruptly with Japan’s defeat. About a week before Japan surrendered in 1945, the U.S.S.R. declared war against Japan and sent troops into North Korea. At the same time the Americans unilaterally decided that the 38th Parallel would be the “temporary” post-war dividing line between the two Koreas. Stalin agreed at the time, though the Koreans were never consulted.

While the Koreans were furious at this further “occupation,” by 1948 two separate governments had been established. The Republic of Korea came into being in the south with Syngman Rhee as President, while Kim II Sung, a former 1930s guerrilla leader who had fought against the hated Japanese in Manchuria, headed The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in the north.

North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. It was quickly obvious that the South Koreans were woefully unprepared. Kim’s troops seized Seoul, the capital, and pushed Rhee’s troops backward until they held just the perimeter around Pusan, about 19% of the country. Unfortunately for Kim, he had misjudged Harry Truman. The day after the invasion Truman authorized planes and ships for Korea. Four days later, he sent American ground troops.

Douglas MacArthur was named Commanding General of United Nations forces and made a bold landing behind the enemy lines at Inch’On. The landing succeeded and it was the North’s turn to be pushed back. The U.N. troops occupied much of the North, but that prompted the Chinese Communist to enter the fray and help move the U.N. troops back out of North Korea.

Though there were skirmishes back and forth, the war then settled into a stalemate, which ended when an armistice was signed in July 1953. The armistice established a Demilitarized Zone, but both countries ended up pretty much where they had started. Like other wars in the Cold War period, the Korean War was not a direct confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, but more of a sphere-of-influence war. The U.S. certainly had “boots on the ground” but the Soviet Union, with the exception of air support, basically limited their involvement to the supply of weapons and material, as well as diplomatic support.

Sandwiched between World War II and the Vietnam War, the Korean War was often referred to as the “Forgotten War” even though between 1950 and 1953, the United States suffered almost 110,000 battle casualties (killed, wounded, missing, and captured).
THE COLD WAR

N.A.T.O. AND THE WARSAW PACT

In their damaged state, the European countries had little hope they would be able to put up any sort of defense against the Soviet Union, if that became necessary. The Soviet's avid post-war acquisition of land and influence in Central and Eastern Europe made the rest of Europe fearful for their own futures. It was in this climate of uncertainty that the Western European countries made strong overtures to the U.S. to become part of N.A.T.O. The 1949 N.A.T.O. founding countries included 10 European countries, plus the United States and Canada. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, who had so recently been the Allied Supreme Commander in Europe, was named the first N.A.T.O. Supreme Commander.

One of the most significant changes in the N.A.T.O. structure came on May 9, 1955, when West Germany became a member state. The Russians were not happy when the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was formed in 1949 and responded by creating the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). When West Germany joined N.A.T.O., the Soviets saw that action as an immediate military threat and within a week had created the Warsaw Pact. The two organizations were outward and visible signs of the Cold War chasm between the Soviet Union and the West.

The Soviet influence was evident from the start as the Pact appointed Russia's First Deputy Minister of Defense to be the Supreme Commander of the Warsaw Pact's military forces, as well as choosing the First Deputy Head of the Soviet General Staff to also serve as the Head of the Warsaw Pact's Unified Staff. While the N.A.T.O. countries had their ups and downs during the Cold War (i.e., when Charles de Gaulle asked all N.A.T.O. personnel who were not French to leave the country in 1966), there was nothing in N.A.T.O. activities that could equal the shock to Czechoslovakia on that August 1968 day when their citizens woke up to find they had been invaded by their five Warsaw Pact comrades: the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Hungary, and Bulgaria.
THE COLD WAR

COMMIES, SPIES, SENATOR JOSEPH MCCARTHY & ANTI-COMMUNISM

The aggressiveness of the Soviets in post-war Europe, the fall of China to the Communists and Stalin’s first atomic test in 1949 had made many ordinary Americans come to share Churchill’s distrust of the Soviets and to see Communism as a real threat to the U.S. In February 1950, Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin told the Republican Women’s Club of Wheeling, West Virginia, that over 200 Communists were working in the State Department. McCarthy’s claim was taken seriously.

When the U.S. entered the war in December 1941 the Soviets were already part of the Western alliance, but often the U.S.S.R. behaved less like an ally than as a country protecting its own interests. At the 1945 Yalta Conference, for example, it was clear Stalin’s only goal was to establish a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern and Central Europe that would create a defensive perimeter protecting the Russian Rodina (Motherland). Self-interest was central to Soviet government policy and that was recognized by Winston Churchill a scant six months after the surrender of Japan, when he described a Soviet “iron curtain” that “has descended across the Continent” in a March 1946 speech.

McCarthy, on a nation’s fear and shortly thereafter, New Yorker (and City College graduate) Julius Rosenberg was arrested on the charge of spying for the Soviet Union during the war. McCarthy felt vindicated by the Rosenberg arrest and continued to try to expose Communist spies and sympathizers employed by the U.S. government.

There were certainly Communists working for the U.S. government and in fact, Julius Rosenberg was a spy and did arrange for a secret about the first atomic bomb (The Manhattan Project) to be passed to the Soviets. But McCarthy believed anyone who disagreed with him was a Communist and that anyone with any sympathy for Communism was disloyal to the United States.

The Republicans won the 1952 election in a landslide. Senator McCarthy was able to use the authority of the Senate Permanent Subcommitteee on Investigations to further his search for hidden Communists in government. The State Department and the Voice of America became targets of what could fairly be called witch hunts. McCarthy was a bully at these hearings. His manner was belligerent and his language was filled with innuendos and half truths.

In the end it was the U.S. Army and television that brought him down. McCarthy accused the Army of being infiltrated with communist spies. In 1954, the Army went on the counterattack, accusing McCarthy and his lawyer Roy Cohn of asking for special treatment for a friend. Just before the Army-McCarthy Hearings were to begin, Edward R. Murrow, host of one of the most popular television news programs of the time, “See It Now,” devoted a whole program to Senator McCarthy. Murrow ran clips of McCarthy accusing the Democrats of treason and identifying the American Civil Liberties Union as a front for the Communist Party.

The Army-McCarthy Hearings were broadcast on live television and millions of people saw McCarthy’s behavior for themselves. Army Chief Counsel Joseph Welch finally stood up to McCarthy on June 9, 1954, when he asked, “Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?” Murrow, Welch and his own behavior left McCarthy’s reputation pretty much in shreds. By the end of the year, McCarthy had been censured by the Senate and he died in May 1957 at the age of 48.
THE COLD WAR

DUCK AND COVER: COPING WITH THE NUCLEAR THREAT

For many Americans, the most immediate nuclear threat during the Cold War period was the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Public advertisements and programs produced by the Office of the United States Civil Defense, however, kept the possibility of Soviet missiles launching a nuclear attack on the United States in the public consciousness.

Though information on the effects of a nuclear attack was somewhat limited at the time, almost all American school children had frequent civil defense drills in their classrooms. Cartoons and posters featuring such characters as Bert the Turtle with messages such as “he carries his shelter on his back—but you must learn to seek shelter” were used to train children about what to do in the event of a nuclear emergency.

The term “Duck and Cover” comes from the instruction that in case of a nuclear attack, children (or anyone else) should drop to the floor, duck under a heavy piece of furniture and cover their heads with their hands. They could also crouch against an inside wall and turn away from the windows to shield themselves from flying glass.

While children were practicing in school, there were Civil Defense drills for adults as well. Most small towns had a Civil Defense room to warn people to take shelter in the case of an impending attack. All across America, many of the children of the 1950s and 1960s still remember that Civil Defense sirens were tested at noon on Saturdays.

Almost all schools and most public buildings were designated as public air raid shelters. If you happened to be outside in a public area when the Civil Defense siren sounded, you were told to look for one of the bright yellow metal signs with the yellow and black Civil Defense logo posted on the outside of buildings.

Families were also encouraged to build shelters in their basements or underground in their back yards and to stock enough supplies to last two weeks. Suggested supplies included blankets, water, food, a bottle opener, reading material, toys for the children, a first aid kit, flashlights, batteries and a portable toilet. A number of companies manufactured prefabricated shelters made of plywood or metal which were supposed to be “easily” installed by the homeowner.

Many police officers at both local and state levels were equipped with special gear to help keep them safe as they tried to rescue people in the aftermath of a nuclear blast. New Jersey called their Civil Defense rescue service trucks “Calamity Janes.”

Most home fallout shelters, even the prefabricated ones, were fairly sparse, but the Cadillac of fallout shelters was the one built at the end of the Eisenhower Administration under the Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia. This fallout shelter was built for Congress and the shelter included a dining hall and kitchen, a power plant, dormitories and a storage room for records. The existence of this shelter was kept secret for 30 years until a Washington Post journalist published a story about the shelter in 1992. After the story, the shelter was closed. Most of the equipment that was in the shelter has been moved to other government properties. For a while, the Greenbrier ran tours of the shelter, but the Greenbrier shelter is now closed to the public.
Suez Crisis – 1956

The Diplomatic Corps use a phrase, “counter-productive enterprise,” which is a very good description of the 1956 Suez Crisis. In 1954 the British and the Egyptians signed the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. Britain agreed to withdraw their troops, but retained the right to send them back if the Canal was attacked. Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt’s president, was very fond of playing superpowers off against each other to obtain the best possible results for Egypt. Water is of major concern to Egypt and Nasser wanted the United States to fund the building of the Aswan Dam to help irrigation and control floods. The U.S. turned him down and Nasser promptly nationalized the Suez Canal.

Because the Suez Canal was of great importance to worldwide commerce, the British, the French and the Israelis came up with one of the silliest plots ever devised. The Israelis would attack the Canal Zone and after waiting a day or so, British and French troops would have an excuse to rush in and “rescue” the canal. The whole thing fell apart and much to the surprise of the conspirators, Eisenhower came down on the side of the Egyptians. The Russians came out the real winner. Though there is evidence he didn’t really mean it, Khrushchev threatened to attack the conspirators with rockets if they didn’t immediately agree to a ceasefire. The Americans were actually more influential regarding the establishment of a ceasefire, but the Soviets got the credit. Israel was a fairly new country with little pretensions to being a superpower, but the failed plot was disastrous for Britain and France who had not only irritated the U.S., one of their main allies, but made themselves look publicly foolish and incompetent.

Afghan-Soviet War – 1979-1989

In 1978, Afghan Communists seized power in a coup and by the end of the year had signed a friendship treaty with the U.S.S.R. The Soviets supported the D.R.A. (Democratic Republic of Afghanistan), but resistance to the Soviets and their allies was high among the Mujahideen (Afghan tribal groups). In 1986, the U.S. began to support the Mujahideen, most spectacularly with Stinger missiles, which the rebels used to shot down Soviet planes. As more and more Russian troops were killed, the war lost support at home from the ordinary Russian who saw no Russian national interest in Afghanistan. Peace accords were signed in 1988 and the last Soviet troops were gone by February 1989. The Afghan War cost the Soviets material, troops and prestige, both at home and abroad. These costs, on top of an already shaky economy, contributed to the breakdown of the U.S.S.R.
While some incidents during the Cold War competition between superpowers were very serious, (think of those Russian and American tanks, practically nose-to-nose at Check Point Charlie in Berlin), other events seemed more for-fut-tat (think of the 1959 "Kitchen Debate" when Vice-President Nixon essentially said to Nikita Khrushchev that "our kitchens are better than your kitchens"). The variety of competition in the Space Race was much the same. Because the Soviet Union had sent up three dogs (the first one died), the United States decided to import chimpanzees from Africa and sent at least two of them into orbit. The Soviets responded by sending tortoises and mealworms around the moon.

Orbiting fruit flies was one thing. The real test of superiority was manned space flight. The Soviets got that first as well with Yuri Gagarin's 108-minute flight on April 12, 1961. Alan Shepard was not far behind when, less than a month later, he became the first American in space. All sorts of other firsts followed: the first manned orbit of the earth; the first flight without spacesuits; the first woman in space (Valentina Tereshkova) and the first spacewalk.

As is often the case, while each incremental advance was impressive at the time, familiarity bred contempt. After Sputnik, the Eisenhower Administration had convinced Congress to authorize the money to create NASA (the National Aeronautics and Space Administration). Congress appropriated the money and by 1959, NASA began its Mercury manned space program.

Eisenhower may have created NASA, but John Kennedy decided to send it to the moon.

On May 25, 1961, President Kennedy spoke to a joint session of Congress: “I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth.” The moon-landing project promised discoveries from the scientific side of such an undertaking, as well as providing jobs for thousands. Of course it didn’t hurt that such a massive project would require untold thousands of supplies and those supply orders could be spread around the country.

Neil Armstrong of the United States did walk on the moon on July 20, 1969. Kennedy did not live to see the culmination of his challenge eight years before, but many of the worldwide audience sitting glued to their television sets that day remembered that Kennedy had made the day possible as Armstrong stepped off that ladder and said: “That’s one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind.”
**THE COLD WAR**

**THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS**

After the failure of the United States-led Bay of Pigs invasion, both Castro and Khrushchev were convinced that Kennedy was only biding his time before he invaded Cuba again. In addition, Khrushchev was convinced that the 15 Jupiter missiles that Kennedy had sent to Turkey were a direct threat to the Soviet Union. One reason he cited for putting the missiles in Cuba was that it would teach America what it felt like to have missiles pointed at them.

On August 17, 1962, John McCone, then director of the Central Intelligence Agency, reported the construction of a possible missile installation in Cuba. Both Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara disagreed. A week later McCones's information was discussed by the National Security Council. On August 31, President Kennedy is told that a U-2 surveillance camera had confirmed missile sites in Cuba.

On September 7, the Soviet ambassador assured U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson that Russia was only supplying defense weapons to Cuba. After receiving further confirmation and briefing Congressional leaders, President Kennedy addressed the nation on October 22. He announced both the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba and his decision to authorize a naval blockade. Kennedy also made clear that the United States would consider any missile fired from Cuba to be the responsibility of the Soviet Union.

Both the United States and Russia thought they were the winners in the Cuban Missile Crisis. John Kennedy was so convinced that the United States had won both a moral and political victory that he told his staff and some news people that it was important not to gloat in public and embarrass Khrushchev. Khrushchev on the other hand pointed out that he had been able to get JFK to promise that the United States would not invade Cuba. Another concession that the Soviets gained, which was not publicly revealed at the time, was the Americans' promise to remove their missiles from Turkey. Being victorious of course can sometimes be in the eye of the beholder.

Within a year, Kennedy and Khrushchev had signed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the first disarmament agreement of the nuclear age, and that might have been the greatest victory of all.
In early 1950, both Mao’s Communist China and the Soviet Union recognized Ho Chi Minh’s government. At almost the same time, both the United Kingdom and the United States recognized South Vietnam. The lines were now drawn for what is sometimes called the Second Indochina War, but what we in the United States know as the Vietnam War.

The following August the North Vietnamese allegedly attacked a U.S. Naval destroyer in international waters and Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, Congress never passed an actual war resolution, but Johnson relied on the Tonkin resolution for authority to escalate the war. While Johnson’s original intention was a limited war, he ended by widening the scope of American involvement, but failed to take the American public into his confidence.

That failure led to a credibility gap and a growing anti-war movement that became more vocal as losses mounted and the number of Americans who served in Vietnam reached 2.7 million, many of them draftees. By the time the classified Department of Defense report on the conduct of the war (“The Pentagon Papers”) was leaked to The New York Times in 1971, Martin Luther King, Jr. had spoken against the war, draft boards had been raided, thousands of draft dodgers had moved to Canada or Sweden, and there had been an anti-war march on Washington attended by an estimated half a million people.
The Cold War

The Berlin Wall

In the years after the airlift, West Germany joined the Western community of nations and became an integral part of Europe. With the help of the Marshall Plan, West Germany began to experience what has been referred to as the “German economic miracle” or Wirtschaftswunder.

After the Soviet attempt to blockade Berlin in 1948-49, there was no longer any doubt that the Cold War had truly begun. In September 1949 the three Western Zones officially merged and became the Federal Republic of Germany (F.D.R.). A month later the communists in East Germany created the German Democratic Republic (G.D.R.).

East Germany, on the other hand, was poor and becoming poorer. The East German standard of living steadily declined and the only thing that increased were prices. East Germany was becoming not only a burden to the East Germans, but to the Russians as well. From documents later released from Russian archives, it seems fairly clear that Stalin’s original thought was to unite Germany under Soviet control. When the Allies refused to be pushed out of not only Berlin, but the rest of Germany as well, Stalin did not have a “plan B.” Once the Federal Republic of Germany was created by the Western Powers, the Russians had little choice but to formally make East Germany a country as well.

Stalin died in March 1953 and that June workers revolted against increased obligations placed on them by the East German government headed by Walter Ulbricht. In a move that, up until then was unheard of in communist countries, groups of East Germans protested in front of the House of Ministers demanding a lower cost of living and free elections. Russian troops and tanks crushed the revolt in short order. The Soviets publicly blamed the revolt on Western influence.

A major problem for Ulbricht was that East Berliners just had to look across to West Berlin to see how good life could be in the West. From 1949 to 1961, more than a million and a half East Germans, many of them highly skilled, used the East Berlin crossing points to move to the West.

In early June 1961 Khrushchev saw what he thought was a chance to intimidate a young President Kennedy. Kennedy’s response was to go on American national television in July and say, “we will not permit the Communists to drive us out of Berlin.” Kennedy also asked Congress for new army and marine divisions and to significantly raise the number of men called by the draft. Ulbricht, in the meantime, was stirring up trouble by talking about the benefits of a separate peace agreement between the G.D.R. and the Soviets. This was not at all reassuring to the East Germans and immigration to the West only increased.

It has become clear that it was Ulbricht who was pushing the Soviets for the wall. Khrushchev had had hope of the West agreeing to either leave the city or to make Berlin a “free city,” but after Kennedy’s robust response to the U.S.S.R. early in the summer, Khrushchev gave in. On the morning of August 13, 1961, Berliners woke up to find barbed wire separating the city. That barbed wire turned into the wall that separated East and West Berlin until 1989.

When the blockade and airlift began, Stalin was primarily interested in getting the Western Allies out of Berlin. In 1961 Ulbricht and Khrushchev were less concerned about keeping the West out, than about keeping the East Germans in. When the wall finally came down in November 1989, it was a symbol of the fall of Communism. Although the Soviet Union itself did not dissolve until 1991, in a very real way, the fall of the Berlin Wall was also the end of the Cold War.