

The George H. W. Bush Presidency

READING FOCUS

- What challenges did George Bush face in the 1988 presidential election?
- How did the Cold War come to an end?
- In what ways did the United States play a new international role after the end of the Cold War?
- What effect did domestic issues have on Bush's presidency?

MAIN IDEA

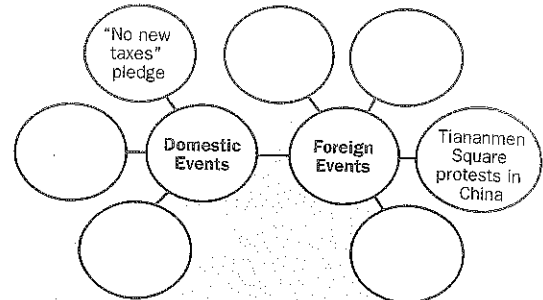
George H. W. Bush achieved notable foreign policy successes, but domestic crises eroded his public support.

KEY TERMS

Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
Persian Gulf War
downsizing

TAKING NOTES

Copy the web diagram below. As you read, fill in each blank circle with important events that affected George Bush's domestic and foreign policy.



George Bush won a solid victory in the 1988 election.

Setting the Scene It is not easy to follow a legendary President. George Bush had the same problem as William Howard Taft, who succeeded Theodore Roosevelt in 1909. So did Harry Truman, who inherited the presidency upon the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1945. Ronald Reagan remained enormously popular as he left office in 1989, and Bush sought to continue the revolution his predecessor had begun. But he lacked Reagan's charismatic appeal and found that it was not always easy to measure up.



The 1988 Election

The son of a well-to-do Connecticut senator, Bush served in World War II as a bomber pilot in the Pacific and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. After the war, he had a profitable career in the Texas oil industry.

In 1966, he began a long and distinguished political career, serving in many roles: member of Congress from Texas; ambassador to the United Nations under Nixon; chairperson of the Republican National Committee; American envoy to China under President Ford; and head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) until 1977. He was well connected and earned a reputation as a moderate and loyal Republican.

Despite these impressive credentials, Bush lacked the support of conservatives in the Republican Party. Some Republicans, whose hero was Ronald Reagan, questioned Bush's commitment to their cause. They were concerned about his apparent early sympathy for abortion rights, and they never truly forgave him for calling Reagan's economic plans "voodoo economics" during the 1980 primary election campaign. Bush's loyal service as Reagan's Vice President for eight years had failed to ease their fears.

Bush began the 1988 campaign far behind his Democratic opponent, Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts. Dukakis had revived

his state after years of economic distress and promised to bring the “Massachusetts Miracle” to the rest of the nation.

Bush took the offensive in what soon became a nasty contest. One part of his campaign was a pledge that there would be “no new taxes” if he became President. Reagan’s popular tax cuts had contributed to the huge budget deficit and national debt. Reagan’s successor would be under great pressure to raise taxes in order to reduce the deficit. Yet Bush publicly committed himself to holding the line on taxes.

Bush attacked Dukakis on many issues. He aired ads describing Dukakis as soft on crime and questioning the accuracy of the “Massachusetts Miracle.” His campaign challenged Dukakis’s environmental record by airing pictures of garbage in the polluted Boston harbor. Bush’s attack ads successfully damaged Dukakis, although they apparently alienated some voters. Americans complained that neither candidate addressed the major issues facing the country. Nearly half of all eligible voters stayed home.

Bush won a solid 54 percent of the popular vote and carried 40 states in a 426–111 electoral vote win. But he failed to gain the mandate Reagan had enjoyed, as Democrats still controlled both houses of Congress.

The Cold War Ends

Bush’s major triumphs came in foreign policy. Even more than Reagan, Bush benefited from the historic changes in the Communist world that were unleashed by Mikhail Gorbachev.

The Soviet leader started a chain reaction that would eventually bring down Europe’s “Iron Curtain” and dissolve the Soviet Union. It began with Gorbachev’s public statements encouraging Eastern European leaders to adopt *perestroika* and *glasnost*. The suggestion was unthinkable in a region where police states efficiently smothered all opposition. Yet it was enough to give hope and inspiration to anti-Communist movements throughout

READING CHECK

What strategies did George Bush use in the 1988 presidential election?

MAP SKILLS In the late 1980s the Eastern bloc shattered into a jigsaw puzzle of diverse countries. *Regions* What kinds of problems do you think might follow the breakup of such a large nation as the Soviet Union?

Europe and Western Asia After the Cold War, 1994



VIEWING HISTORY Berliners from both sides of the city celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall with joyous, all-night celebrations. **Making Comparisons** Compare and contrast the roles played by ordinary people in the fall of communism in East Germany and in the Soviet Union.



Eastern Europe that had worked for decades, at great risk, to keep a democratic spirit alive.

Poland In Poland, the stage was set for the downfall of Soviet communism. The story had begun in 1970, when severe food shortages provoked riots in the city of Gdansk. A witness to those riots was a young electrician named Lech Walesa, who worked in the huge Lenin Shipyard at Gdansk. Walesa became involved in anti-Communist union organizing and lost his job after helping to lead a protest in 1976.

When shipyard workers at Gdansk launched a strike in 1980, Walesa climbed over the fence of the facility and joined them, becoming head of a movement that grew with great speed. After two tense weeks, the government gave in to workers' demands for the right to form a free and independent trade union.

Union activity spread throughout Poland, forming an alliance called Solidarity. The Communist government launched a crackdown in 1981, banning Solidarity and jailing its leaders, including Walesa. But support for Solidarity remained alive. In 1983, Walesa, a plain-speaking man with little education, won the Nobel peace prize for his acts of courage.

In 1988, further economic collapse in Poland sparked a new round of protests and strikes. The Communist-led government agreed to meet with Solidarity and together they scheduled free elections for June 1989. In Poland's first free elections in half a century, voters chose as president the electrician from Gdansk, Lech Walesa.

The Berlin Wall Falls Throughout Eastern Europe, anti-Communist revolts broke out. Each country had its own stories of courage and its own heroes. In Czechoslovakia, a poet and playwright once persecuted by the Communists, Vaclav Havel, was elected president. Eventually, new regimes took charge in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Albania. But the most dramatic events of 1989 took place in East Germany.

East Germany's hardline Communist rulers maintained a strong grip on the state, symbolized by the Berlin Wall that divided East Germans from the democratic West. In the summer of 1989, East German tourists visiting Hungary took advantage of newly opened borders there to escape to Austria and West Germany. Their flight embarrassed East German leaders. In East German cities, nonviolent protests pressured the country's dictator, Erich Honecker, to institute reforms and open border crossings. On November 9, the government announced that East Germans could travel freely to West Germany.

East Germans flooded around and over the hated Berlin Wall. Germans scaled it from both sides and stood atop the structure, cheering and chanting and waving signs. They came with sledgehammers and smashed it with glee. The wall, the most potent symbol of the Cold War, had been breached. Within a month, the Communist Party had begun to collapse. A year later, East and West Germany reunified.

The Soviet Union Gorbachev hoped to reform the Soviet system while keeping the Communist Party in power, but events slipped beyond his control. In August 1991, conservative Communists in the Soviet Union staged a coup and held Gorbachev captive, hoping to pressure him to resign. The coup quickly collapsed, but the Soviet Union's 15 republics sensed weakness in the central government and began to move toward independence.

Gorbachev resigned the presidency of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991. One week later the Soviet Union no longer existed. It had been replaced by a loose alliance of former Soviet republics called the Commonwealth of Independent States. Russia's new president, Boris Yeltsin, emerged as the dominant leader in this fragmented land.

As the Soviet Union disintegrated, Bush continued arms-control talks with Gorbachev. The Soviets and Americans signed a number of pacts that signaled the end of the Cold War. Agreements in 1989 and 1990 limited the buildup of nuclear and chemical weapons. The first **Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty**, known as START I, called for dramatic reductions in the two nations' supplies of long-range nuclear weapons. It was signed in 1991. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Bush continued to negotiate with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia.

"The Cold War is now behind us," Gorbachev had declared. "Let us not wrangle over who won it." But clearly the United States was now the world's lone superpower.

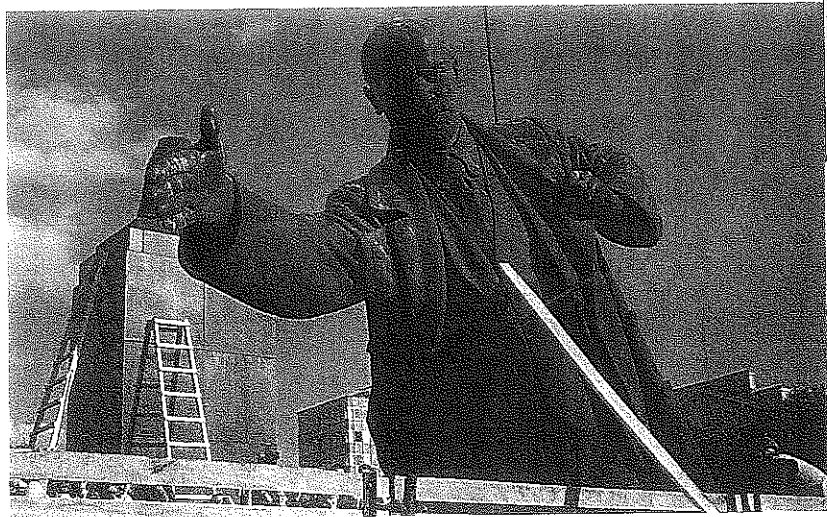
A New International Role

President Bush hoped the world would move smoothly from the hostility of the Cold War to a peaceful "New World Order" under the leadership of the United States and its allies. Instead, conflicts in different regions of the world became the focus of American foreign policy. As the world's sole superpower, the United States needed to respond to crises abroad in a new way.

Tiananmen Square The People's Republic of China occupied much of America's attention in 1989. As Communist governments tottered in Eastern Europe, Chinese students gathered in the capital, Beijing, to march for democracy and reform. In May, protesters occupied Tiananmen Square in the heart of the city, despite official orders to leave. Their numbers soon swelled to more than one million across the city. In Tiananmen Square, they built a "Goddess of Democracy" modeled on the Statue of Liberty.

On June 3, China's leaders ordered the army to attack the protester camps. Hundreds, possibly thousands, of demonstrators died and others quickly scattered in the face of overwhelming military force. The government cracked down on the democracy movement after the attack and many more people were imprisoned and executed.

Bush valued the relationship the United States had with China. Rather than attack China's leaders and risk an international crisis, Bush preferred to negotiate quietly and encourage trade between China and the United States. His nonconfrontational stance upset many people who believed he was indifferent to human rights in China.



Statues of Communist heroes such as Vladimir Lenin (shown above) and Karl Marx were removed from cities across Eastern Europe in the 1990s.

Focus on ECONOMICS

China's Transformation Although China's Communist Party held onto power in the 1980s and 1990s, it had long before begun to abandon some of its Communist principles. Under Deng Xiaoping, China moved toward a market-oriented economy based on capitalism and foreign trade. Exports to the United States increased from \$4 billion in 1985 to nearly \$26 billion in 1992.



Sounds of an Era

Listen to George Bush's speech and other sounds from the Reagan-Bush era.

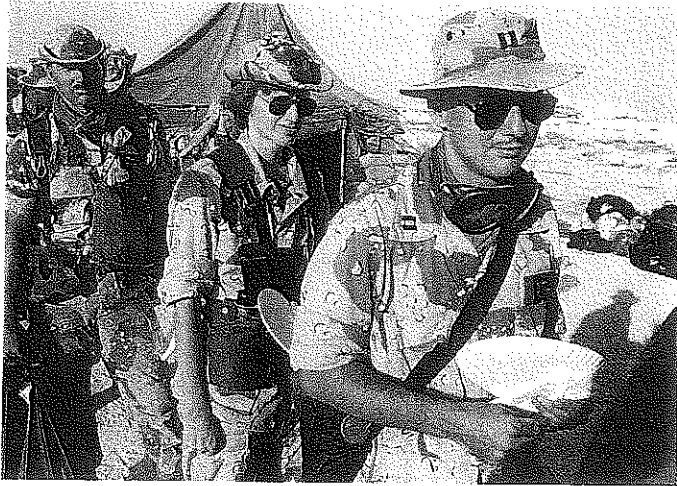
The Invasion of Panama Bush enjoyed more support later that year when he acted against the Central American nation of Panama. Bush suspected General Manuel Noriega, Panama's dictator, of smuggling cocaine into the United States. After Noriega declared war on the United States, Bush launched a lightning attack against Panama in December 1989 and quickly won control of the country. Noriega surrendered to American forces on January 3, 1990, and two years later a federal jury in Florida convicted him of drug smuggling. The invasion demonstrated Bush's willingness to act boldly to stop the flow of drugs into the United States.

The Persian Gulf War In August 1990, the Arab nation of Iraq, headed by a brutal dictator, Saddam Hussein, launched a sudden invasion of neighboring Kuwait. Saddam justified the assault by citing centuries-old territorial claims. But in fact he had his sights on Kuwait's substantial oil wealth.

Of concern to the Bush administration was the flow of Kuwaiti oil to the West. Bush viewed the protection of those oil reserves as an issue of national security. The administration was also concerned about the security of Saudi Arabia, a key Arab ally in the region, and Saddam's investment in destructive weapons. Bush responded strongly:

“There is much in the modern world that is subject to doubts or questions—washed in shades of gray. But not the brutal aggression of Saddam Hussein against a peaceful, sovereign nation and its people. It's black and white. The facts are clear. The choice is unambiguous—right versus wrong.”

—George Bush, 1990



VIEWING HISTORY American soldiers fought a brief, victorious war, aided by the open terrain that provided no shelter for Iraq's armies. **Determining Relevance** Why did the Bush administration decide to intervene militarily in this regional conflict?

Americans at first seemed reluctant to get involved in a territorial matter between Arab nations. As the weeks passed, however, rising oil prices and reports of Iraqi atrocities against Kuwaiti civilians drew increasing concern.

Months of diplomatic efforts failed to persuade Saddam to withdraw. Finally, the United States, working through the United Nations, mobilized an alliance of 28 countries to launch the **Persian Gulf War**. It was a limited military operation to drive Iraqi forces out of Kuwait.

To organize military operations, President Bush turned to General Colin Powell. Powell had risen quickly through the ranks of the military. In 1979, at age 42, he had become the Army's youngest brigadier

general. He was the first African American to serve as national security advisor. By 1989, he had been named the nation's youngest ever Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the top military officer in the nation.

Powell's battle plan was simple. He would use airpower to destroy Iraq's ability to wage war, and then smash the Iraqi forces occupying Kuwait. A series of massive air strikes, known as “Operation Desert Storm,” was launched on January 16–17, 1991. UN forces, directed by General Powell and led by Norman Schwarzkopf, liberated Kuwait in just six weeks of war. The allies had lost fewer than 300 soldiers, while tens of thousands of Iraqi troops had died.

Bush opted not to send troops deep into Iraq to oust Saddam, expecting that Saddam's opponents would soon overthrow him. Yet Saddam's opposition

proved weaker than Bush's advisors had thought, and he remained in power.

Domestic Issues

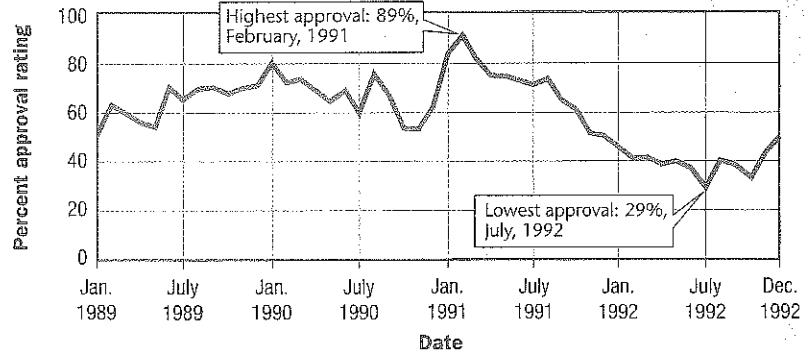
Bush's leadership during the Persian Gulf War drove his approval rating up to an astounding 89 percent. Yet while his foreign policy generally won him praise, Americans began to believe that Bush did not have a clear plan for handling domestic problems. In the end, this perception helped usher him out of office.

Bush angered many moderates and liberals with his nomination of Clarence Thomas, a conservative black judge, to the Supreme Court in 1991 when Thurgood Marshall retired. Thomas faced grilling about his views on civil rights and about charges of past sexual harassment. Thomas won confirmation after stormy televised Senate hearings that ignited public debate on the issue of sexual harassment.

Budget deficits continued to swell during Bush's presidency. Bush countered by slowing spending for social programs. Finally, he agreed to a deficit reduction plan that included new taxes. The tax hike broke Bush's 1988 campaign promise and generated public anger.

Bush's real undoing was a recession that began in the early 1990s. Turmoil in the Persian Gulf led gasoline prices to rise rapidly, creating unexpected costs for businesses and consumers alike. The end of the Cold War enabled the United States to spend less on defense. As a result, firms that supplied planes, ships, and military hardware laid off workers. Companies in several other industries also laid off workers to cut costs in a process called **downsizing**. By 1991, the jobless rate reached 7 percent, the highest level in nearly five years. The recession was felt unevenly across the country. States that relied heavily on defense spending, including California and Connecticut, were hit much harder than others.

George H. W. Bush's Approval Ratings



SOURCE: The Gallup Organization

INTERPRETING GRAPHS

The percentage of Americans who believed Bush was doing a good job plunged from a high of 89 percent during the Gulf War to only 29 percent 17 months later. **Analyzing Information** What were Bush's approval ratings in early 1990, before the Gulf War and the recession?

Section

4

Assessment

READING COMPREHENSION

1. What factors helped George Bush win the 1988 presidential election?
2. List two reasons why Communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed in 1989.
3. How did China's Communist government react to democracy protests in 1989?
4. What domestic issues damaged Bush's popularity?

CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

5. **Making Comparisons** How was the Persian Gulf War fought differently from the Vietnam War?
6. **Demonstrating Reasoned Judgment** Was it reasonable for Americans to believe that the Cold War would be followed by international peace and cooperation? Why or why not?
7. **Defending a Position** Some people describe George Bush's presidency as Reagan's third term. Explain whether you agree or disagree.



Take It to the NET

Activity: Making a Flowchart
What have been the lasting effects of the Persian Gulf War? Research this conflict and create a flowchart of key events in the region before, during, and after the war. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area at the following Web site for help in completing this activity.
www.phschool.com