

## American History: Presidency of George H.W. Bush



**AP**  
President George Bush  
and Soviet President  
Mikhail Gorbachev in  
Helsinki, Finland, in 1990

STEVE EMBER: Welcome to THE MAKING OF A NATION – American history in VOA Special English. I’m Steve Ember.

This week in our series, we continue the story of President George Herbert Walker Bush. He was elected the forty-first president of the United States in nineteen eighty-eight.

(MUSIC)

George H.W. Bush was president when the Cold War ended between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Cold War had lasted more than forty years. Both sides were heavily armed with nuclear weapons. People worried that one wrong move could lead to the end of the world.

But by the late nineteen eighties, the world was changing. The Soviet Union was dying.

On November ninth, nineteen eighty-nine, East Germany opened the Berlin Wall for the first time since it had been built. The wall had divided communist East Germany from democratic West Germany since nineteen sixty-one.

Citizens and soldiers together soon began tearing it down.

Tensions continued to ease as communist rule in most of the former Soviet republics ended by the early nineteen nineties.

Fifteen republics had belonged to the Soviet Union. By the end of nineteen ninety-one, most had declared their independence. They became a loosely formed group called the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Countries that had considered the United States their enemy, now looked to it to lead the way to peace and, they hoped, prosperity.

(MUSIC)

As the Soviet Union was dying, President Bush repeatedly negotiated with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. One of those meetings took place in the spring of nineteen ninety in the United States. It led to an agreement calling for both sides to destroy most of their chemical weapons. The two leaders also agreed to increase trade relations.

The American and Soviet presidents met in Moscow in July nineteen ninety-one. There, they signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, known as START I. This treaty called for both sides to reduce their numbers of long-range nuclear weapons. They promised to cut the number by about one-third over seven years.

START I became the first agreement between the two powers to order cuts in existing supplies of nuclear weapons.

In September nineteen ninety-one, President Bush said the United States would remove most of its short-range nuclear weapons from service. He also said the United States would destroy many of them. The next month, the Soviets announced that they would do the same.

On December twenty-fifth of that year, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as president, as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics came to an end.

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV (WITH TRANSLATOR): "Compatriots, due to the situation, which has evolved as a result of the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States, I hereby discontinue my activities at the post of president of the U.S.S.R."

Six months earlier, Russians had chosen Boris Yeltsin as the first democratically elected leader of Russia. When the Soviet Union collapsed, he became the most important leader of the former republics.



**AP**

President Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin, right, signing the START II treaty in Moscow in 1993

President Bush and President Yeltsin signed another strategic arms reduction treaty, START II, in January nineteen ninety-three.

(MUSIC)

GEORGE BUSH: "My fellow citizens, last night I ordered U.S. military forces to Panama. No

president takes such action lightly."

One of George Bush's military actions as president was to send troops into Panama in December nineteen eighty-nine.

They captured the country's leader, General Manuel Noriega. The United States had charged Noriega with drug trafficking. He had also refused to honor election results that showed another candidate winning the presidency.

President Bush said he also sent troops to the Central American nation to protect the thirty-five-thousand Americans living there.

The American troops easily defeated Noriega's forces. He was taken to the United States where he was tried, found guilty and sent to prison for many years. The United States then supported the presidency of Guillermo Endara, the winner of the election in Panama.

(MUSIC)

GEORGE BUSH: "Five months ago, Saddam Hussein started this cruel war against Kuwait. Tonight, the battle has been joined."

In August nineteen ninety, Iraq invaded its neighbor, Kuwait. The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution threatening war on Iraq unless it withdrew from Kuwait. The council set a deadline of January fifteenth, nineteen ninety-one. But Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein refused.

The United States and other nations were receiving much of their oil from Kuwait and neighboring Saudi Arabia.

President Bush succeeded in forming a coalition with thirty-eight other countries against Iraq. The purpose was to free Kuwait and protect Saudi Arabia against a possible Iraqi invasion.

GEORGE BUSH: "This military action, taken in accord with United Nations resolutions and with the consent of the United States Congress, follows months of constant and virtually endless diplomatic activity on the part of the United Nations, the United States, and many, many other countries. Arab leaders sought what became known as an Arab solution, only to conclude that Saddam Hussein was unwilling to leave Kuwait.

"Others traveled to Baghdad in a variety of efforts to restore peace and justice. Our secretary of state, James Baker, held an historic meeting in Geneva, only to be totally rebuffed. This past weekend, in a last-ditch effort, the secretary-general of the United Nations went to the Middle East with peace in his heart -- his second such mission. And he came back from Baghdad with no progress at all in getting Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait."

(MUSIC)

Coalition forces began an air war against Iraq on January seventeenth, nineteen ninety-one. They bombed Iraqi targets in Iraq and Kuwait. On February twenty-third, the Iraqis set fire to hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells.

WITNESS: "It looks like what I envisioned hell would look like. The country of Kuwait is burning."

The coalition had the long and difficult task of putting those fires out.

On February twenty-fourth, the allied ground war began as part of the operation known as Desert Storm. That ground war lasted just one hundred hours.

(SOUND: Battle)

Saddam Hussein withdrew his forces from Kuwait. But he was still in control of his own country. Years later, some Americans continued to criticize the Bush administration for not trying to oust the Iraqi leader. They believed that Bush should have sent forces to capture Baghdad, the Iraqi capital.

After the war ended, Kurds in northern Iraq rebelled against Saddam Hussein. So did Shiite Muslims in southern Iraq. The Iraqi government crushed both uprisings.

The defeated Kurds fled to Iran and Turkey and into the mountains of northern Iraq. President Bush ordered American troops to help give humanitarian aid to the refugees. The troops established refugee camps for the Kurds.

As time passed, Iraqi soldiers and aircraft continued to attack the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south. Coalition forces led by the United States established "no-fly" zones barring Iraqi aircraft over northern and southern Iraq. Coalition planes enforced these no-fly zones in the years that followed.

(MUSIC)

By late nineteen ninety-two, drought and conflict had caused widespread suffering in Somalia.

GEORGE BUSH: "I want to talk to you today about the tragedy in Somalia, and about a mission that can ease suffering and save lives. Every American has seen the shocking images from Somalia. The scope of suffering there is hard to imagine.

"Already, over a quarter million people have died in the Somali famine. In the months ahead, five times that number, one and a half million people, could starve to death."

The violence and the collapse of the government were keeping many Somalis from receiving food and other aid.

GEORGE BUSH: "The security situation has grown worse. The U.N. has been prevented from deploying its initial commitment of troops. In many cases, food from relief flights is being looted upon landing. Food convoys have been hijacked, aid workers assaulted. Ships with food have been subjected to artillery attacks that have prevented them from docking.

"There is no government in Somalia. Law and order have broken down. Anarchy prevails. One image tells the story – Imagine seven thousand tons of food aid, literally bursting out of a warehouse on a dock in Mogadishu, while Somalis starve, less than a kilometer away, because relief workers cannot run the gauntlet of armed gangs roving the city."

President Bush -- in the last year of his term -- sent American troops to Somalia to assist in the aid efforts.

But the following year, in October of nineteen ninety-three, eighteen American soldiers on a raid were killed in a battle in Mogadishu. More than eighty were wounded. The failed operation would haunt the American military for years to

come. The events of that day were the basis for the book and movie "Black Hawk Down."

(MUSIC)

In December of nineteen ninety-two, as Bush was about to leave office, he and the leaders of Canada and Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement. NAFTA called for removing taxes and other barriers to trade in North America. Some Americans accused Bush of sacrificing American jobs to lower-paid workers in Mexico by supporting NAFTA. Others praised him for supporting the agreement, which still had to pass Congress.

But, by the time it did, George Bush was no longer president. He had lost his campaign for a second term. In November of nineteen ninety-two he lost the election to the Democratic governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton. That will be our story next week.

(MUSIC)

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