be fought because Australia's political survival was under threat from the 'red menace', a term used to describe the Communists during the Cold War. In the years around 1970, opponents of the Vietnam War held large demonstrations in Australian cities.

# The end of the Cold War: one superpower

A series of dramatic events in 1989 heralded the end of the Cold War. In the 1980s, the visionary Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev reformed the country. He introduced economic freedoms called *perestroika*, and political freedoms called *glasnost*. In 1988, Gorbachev withdrew Russian forces from Afghanistan, where they had been embroiled in a long, devastating invasion. He also made it clear to Eastern European countries that they could choose their own political paths. In 1989 the Soviet Union held the first free election since 1917, and there was a series of peaceful revolutions across the region, overturning communist governments in countries including Poland, Hungary and East Germany. The Berlin Wall, erected in 1961 to prevent people escaping from communist East Berlin to democratic West Berlin, had come to stand for the global division between capitalism and communism. In a climactic moment watched intently around the world, the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989, to the great joy of people on both sides.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cold War was over. The United States has since been very conscious of its role as the sole superpower, and maintains a high level of military spending and large armed forces in order to be able to deploy them around the world.



Source 1.19 People from both East and West Berlin were overjoyed when the Berlin Wall fell on 9 November 1989 in a dramatic signal of the end of the Cold War. Berliners climbed the Wall before it was torn down.

# The post-Cold War world

### The Gulf Wars and Afghanistan

In the 1980s, a long and bloody war between Iran and Iraq killed hundreds of thousands of people from both sides. Then, in 1990, Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, invaded Kuwait. In 1991 an alliance of nations pushed the Iraqis back, in what was known as the Persian Gulf War.

During the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s, terrorist attacks on the Russians were led by an Afghan fundamentalist Islamic group called the Taliban, with some support from the United States. In a stunning attack on 11 September 2001, another transnational organisation called al-Qaeda hijacked commercial aeroplanes in the United States and crashed them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Another hijacked aircraft crashed in Pennsylvania. Approximately 3000 people died. In response, the United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan, which was a base of terrorist organisation. In 2003 the United States led an invasion of Iraq, to oust its dictator Saddam Hussein, and declared a 'war on terror'.

Australia participated in the Persian Gulf War, and the later US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Australian troops withdrew from Iraq in 2009.