

LESSON 4

Other US Air Force Military Operations That Supported National Objectives



Quick Write

After reading the vignette, write down what you think it tells you about the importance of good preparation.



Learn About

- Operation Eagle Claw in Iran
- Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada
- Operation El Dorado Canyon in Libya
- Operation Just Cause in Panama
- Humanitarian Operations
- How the Cold War Ended

WHEN A MISSION INVOLVES flying aircraft into a location where there is no base, Air Force combat controllers must go in first to prepare the ground. Major John Carney was the lead combat controller for *Operation Eagle Claw*, the attempt to rescue the American hostages in Iran in 1980.

Major Carney secretly flew into Iran in a small CIA plane. He had one hour on the ground to survey and approve the site, install runway lights, and perform several other tasks. Using a nearby road as a starting point, he marched off a box for the landing strip, burying the runway lights at each corner. Then he buried a light 3,000 feet away from the box but centered on it. This would be the place for a landing aircraft to stop.

While he was working, four vehicles drove by on the road. All Carney could do to hide was to lie flat on the ground.

Carney returned to the site, called *Desert One*, 23 days later with the rescue force, including his team of combat controllers. He was worried about the runway lights. But when the switch was flipped, they turned on, allowing the C-130s to land safely in the Iranian desert. The controllers got all the planes landed and parked safely.

Unfortunately, disaster would strike later in the mission. When it did, Carney had to collect all the runway lights and navigation gear before the rescue force could depart.

Carney retired from the Air Force as a colonel. In retirement he served as president of the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, which gives scholarships to the children of special forces personnel killed in the line of duty.

As the years passed and the Cold War continued, the US Air Force's mission expanded. The US military has been involved in many operations supporting national objectives. These objectives are the desired results of national goals and interests. They may involve the safety of US citizens or efforts to stabilize a democratic government.

The US public's desire to avoid heavy casualties led to more reliance on airpower to support US goals. In addition, the Air Force's increasing ability to attack more precisely and with less risk of losing aircraft made airpower an attractive option.

Besides coordinating operations with its NATO allies in Europe, the United States conducted several operations of its own.

Vocabulary



- coup d'état
- Islamist
- extradite
- diplomat
- variable-geometry wings
- infiltrate
- tsunami

Operation Eagle Claw in Iran

The United States had supported the Shah, or king, of Iran for several decades following World War II. It saw Iran as an important barrier to Soviet Communist expansion in the Middle East. (Iran has a long border with lands that were then part of the Soviet Union.) The United States, Britain, and other allies also had important oil interests in Iran. At one point, in 1953, the United States and Britain backed a **coup d'état**—*the overthrow of a government*—to remove an Iranian prime minister. He wished to seize British oil assets and replace a British oil company with an Iranian state company.

The Shah's goal was to modernize Iran and make it an industrial power. But his government often treated opponents harshly, and corruption and mismanagement were widespread. Iran's conservative Shiite Muslim clergy deeply opposed modernization, with its introduction of Western ideas such as equality for women. Economic difficulties also contributed to rising discontent with the Shah's government throughout the 1970s.

After a year of civil unrest, the Shah fled Iran in February 1979. A senior Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, returned from exile in France to form a new Islamist government. **Islamist** means *based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam that seeks to enforce Islamic values in all areas of life*. In October President Jimmy Carter allowed the Shah to enter the United States for surgery. This enraged the new Iranian government, which demanded that the United States extradite the Shah to face trial and an almost certain death sentence. **Extradite** means *to send a person who has been accused of a crime to another state or country for trial*. The Americans refused.

On 4 November 1979 Islamist “students” raided the US embassy in Iran. They took more than 60 US diplomats hostage. A **diplomat** is *a person who represents his or her country’s government in a foreign country*. In return for the hostages’ release, the Iranians demanded the US government return the Shah of Iran.



Iran and the Middle East

Islam

LIKE JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY, Islam claims its descent from the patriarch Abraham. The word *Islam* means *submission to the will of God*. The followers of Islam are called *Muslims*. Muslims believe in one God. They believe their religion was revealed more than 1,400 years ago in Mecca—today part of Saudi Arabia. They believe that Jesus, Moses, and Abraham were prophets of God, but that Muhammad was the final prophet.

The two main branches of Islam are *Sunni* and *Shia*. Both agree on the fundamentals of Islam, but they have serious differences on many religious questions. The Sunni branch is the larger of the two. Most of the major Arab countries are predominantly Sunni. The non-Arab Persians in Iran are overwhelmingly Shia. Iraq is an Arab country with a strong Shia majority, and large Shia majorities exist in Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan, and elsewhere. A good deal of the violence in the Middle East today can be traced to tensions between the two groups.

Negotiations to gain the hostages' release failed. So President Jimmy Carter ordered a military rescue. *Operation Eagle Claw* began—and ended—on 24 April 1980. Eight Navy helicopters took off from the aircraft carrier USS *Nimitz* in the Persian Gulf.

They headed for a patch of Iranian desert from which they planned to launch the rescue. But three of the helicopters had mechanical problems. Two turned back. The remaining six then ran into an unexpected dust storm, which delayed them an hour. When they arrived, the third helicopter with mechanical problems could not be repaired. This meant there were not enough helicopters to carry the assault team and the rescued hostages. The mission was canceled. As the remaining aircraft were preparing to depart, one of the helicopters and an Air Force MC-130 collided. Five Airmen and three Marines died.

Months later on 20 January 1981—the day President Ronald Reagan assumed office—the US and Iran reached an agreement to free the last 52 hostages. (Iran had released some earlier.)

The US military learned from the experience. It needed to better coordinate joint ventures between different branches of the military. In 1987 Congress passed a law that set up the US Joint Special Operations Command. Its purpose was to conduct special operations, which often involve more than one branch of the armed forces.

Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada

On 13 October 1983 Communists in the government of Grenada overthrew the prime minister and took over the island in the Caribbean. Many suspected Cuba and the Soviet Union were behind the plot.

The Communist takeover put at risk some 600 to 1,000 American students attending a medical college in Grenada. It also endangered hundreds of other Americans living on the island. President Ronald Reagan sent US troops into Grenada on 25 October to rid it of communism and to bring home the American citizens. The mission was dubbed *Operation Urgent Fury*.

Many US Air Force aircraft took part in the mission. One was the AC-130, a gunship that gave cover to troops securing an airfield in Grenada. The AC-130 took on enemy foot soldiers and attacked anti-aircraft systems. Another aircraft was the EC-130, which can broadcast to enemy radio and TV receivers. In Grenada, the EC-130 crews relayed radio messages to local people so they'd know what was happening. A-10 attack aircraft supported Marines seizing a suspected enemy base. The C-141 Starlifter ferried home the students, and later, withdrawing US Soldiers.

Troops from the United States and several Caribbean nations ousted the would-be Communist government. By 15 December they had restored security. The US troops could go home.

The invasion of Grenada had consequences far beyond the Caribbean island. All branches of the armed forces learned some important lessons. The Air Force learned about the need for sufficient airfields and places to organize, or stage, troops and supplies. Navigation problems on C-130s during the invasion spotlighted the need for improved navigation equipment. Damage the C-130s suffered from ground fire led to better defenses against anti-aircraft fire.

Resistance by Grenadian and Cuban forces reinforced the lesson that air superiority is needed before airdropping troops. Also, the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marines had difficulty communicating with each other—they couldn't talk to each other by radio, making it hard to coordinate their efforts.

Finally, the invasion revealed more flaws in the joint command between the services. This made it hard for the different branches of the military to work together as a team. As a result, Congress passed the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Department Reorganization Act of 1986. This led to increased joint command at the Pentagon, with one commander in charge of all the services participating in each operation. This is called a *Unified Combatant Command*.



Grenada and the Caribbean Sea

Operation El Dorado Canyon in Libya

Terrorism against the United States and its allies was a problem long before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. In the 1980s, however, the terrorist groups launching the attacks were supported by national governments in countries like Libya and Iran. Sometimes agents of those countries' secret services were involved.

In December 1985, Libyan leader Colonel Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi expressed support for terrorists who attacked the Rome, Italy, and Vienna, Austria, airports. The terrorists killed 19 people and wounded more than 140. In January 1986, President Ronald Reagan's administration broke off diplomatic relations with Libya and closed the American Embassy in Tripoli. In March, the US Navy retaliated against Libyan naval vessels, aircraft, and missile sites that had attacked US ships. The Navy was sailing in international waters in the Gulf of Sidra that Qadhafi claimed for Libya.

In April, a bomb went off aboard TWA Flight 840 while flying over Greece. Four people were killed. The US government blamed Libya. Three days later, a bomb in a dance club in West Berlin killed two US service members and wounded 200 Germans and Americans. On 14 April President Reagan authorized *Operation El Dorado Canyon*. This mission targeted five military sites in Libya. It was a joint venture of the US Air Force and Navy.

Britain let the Air Force use one of its bases as a launching pad for the operation. US aircraft flew seven hours to reach Libya. The flight took longer than usual because France and Spain wouldn't let the Air Force fly over their airspace. This added more than 1,000 miles each way to the trip. One plane involved was the F-111 Aardvark, whose wings sweep back in flight to enable the craft to reach faster speeds. KC-10 and KC-135 refueling tankers accompanied these fighters on the 6,400-mile round-trip flight. The flight was the longest for any combat mission in Air Force history up to that time.



Libya and its neighbors

Other aircraft played a role as well. The EF-111 jammed Libyan radar. Navy aircraft such as the A-7, A-6, and F-14 joined the Air Force aircraft from carriers in the Mediterranean Sea. The Air Force F-111s struck a barracks and terrorist training camp in Tripoli. The Navy planes attacked an airfield and barracks in Benghazi, Libya's second-largest city.

The mission succeeded, although the Libyans shot down one F-111. But it was very controversial. Many countries criticized the American action. In the United States, the Navy believed it could have conducted the mission by itself. The Air Force wing commander thought the number of F-111s used was too large to maintain the element of surprise. And there were problems with the targeting systems on board the Air Force planes.

But the operation showed that the Air Force could strike targets thousands of miles away. And the technical problems with the F-111s were repaired, leading to that plane's great success five years later in *Operation Desert Storm*.

Operation Just Cause in Panama

Panamanian military leader (and dictator) General Manuel Noriega held power in his Central American country in the 1980s. At the time, the United States protected the Panama Canal under a long-standing treaty with Panama. The canal is a 50-mile route through which ships travel between the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. Some 40,000 Americans lived in Panama.

Noriega was also involved with smuggling illegal drugs and charged with murder and election fraud. Beginning in 1987, members of Noriega's Panama Defense Forces (PDF) began to regularly seize, beat, and harass US military personnel. Noriega was charged with drug trafficking by federal grand juries in the United States in February 1988. In early 1989 the PDF detained nine school buses filled with American children from nearby US bases.

Then in May Noriega's candidate lost the national elections. Noriega declared the election null and void. His supporters attacked and beat opposition candidates and killed one of their bodyguards. A US Navy sailor was kidnapped, robbed, and beaten. This led President George H. W. Bush to send another 1,900 US troops to guard US military installations in Panama. He also withdrew many family members of US service members so the PDF couldn't harass them.

Then a senior PDF commander tried a coup d'état against Noriega. It failed, and Noriega declared that "a state of war" existed between Panama and the United States. In December PDF guards at a roadblock killed a US Marine lieutenant in a car carrying four off-duty US military officers. They also beat a Navy lieutenant who witnessed the incident and assaulted his wife.



Panama

In response to all of this, the United States undertook *Operation Just Cause*. President Bush said the purpose was to “safeguard the lives of Americans, to defend democracy in Panama, to combat drug trafficking, and to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal treaty.” He ordered Noriega’s immediate arrest and extradition to the United States to face drug-smuggling charges.

Just Cause was a joint operation of the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marines. The Air Force’s new F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighter saw its first combat duty. Furthermore, the Air Force delivered 9,500 Army paratroopers in the largest airdrop since 1944. The mission ran from December 1989 until 12 January 1990. US forces arrested Noriega on 3 January 1990. He was convicted in a US court of drug trafficking and money laundering. Elsewhere, a French court convicted him of money laundering, and a Panamanian court convicted him of murder. His US sentence ended in 2007. In 2010, after several appeals, he was extradited to France. A French court released him in 2011 and he was returned to Panama, where he is currently serving his murder sentence.

Operation Just Cause was the first operation under the new joint command structure of the Goldwater-Nichols act. Although the operation was a short one, the system seemed to perform well. It was a sign of things to come—within a year, Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait, and US forces would be deployed to Saudi Arabia in *Operation Desert Shield*.

Significant Aircraft of the Late Cold War Period

General Dynamics F-111 Aardvark

The F-111's design reached back to the Bell X-5 experimental aircraft, which first flew in 1951. The X-5 had a jet engine. Its main experimental function was its wing design. It had wings that could sweep back up to 60 degrees during flight. The sweptback-wing design meant faster flight.

The F-111 fighter-bomber first flew in 1964 and entered Air Force service three years later. Like the X-5, it had **variable-geometry wings**—wings that can be swept forward for takeoffs or slow flight, or swept backward for high-speed flight. The plane could fly very low and hit targets even in bad weather.

In 1972 the Aardvark was sent to Vietnam, where it was used for night strikes against North Vietnam. It was also used against Libya in 1986 during *Operation El Dorado Canyon*. Some 566 of the planes were built.

The F-111 carried two crew members and one cannon. It could carry up to 24 conventional bombs. Its top speed was 1,452 mph with a range of 3,632 miles. The Air Force retired the F-111 in 1996.



F-111 Aardvark

Courtesy US Air Force

Lockheed F-117A Nighthawk

The Lockheed F-117A was developed in response to an Air Force request for an aircraft able to attack high-value targets without being detected by enemy radar. By the 1970s, new materials and techniques allowed engineers to design an aircraft with radar-evading or stealth qualities. The result was the F-117A, the world's first operational stealth aircraft.

The first F-117A flew on 18 June 1981, and the first F-117A unit, the 4450th Tactical Group (renamed the 37th Tactical Fighter Wing in October 1989), became operational in October 1983. The F-117 remained classified until November 1988. It first saw combat during *Operation Just Cause* on 19 December 1989, when two F-117As attacked military targets in Panama.

A total of 59 F-117As were built between 1981 and 1990. In 1989 the F-117A was awarded the Collier Trophy, one of the most prized aeronautical awards in the world.



F-117 Nighthawk

Courtesy US Air Force



An F-14 Tomcat from the aircraft carrier **USS Theodore Roosevelt** flies over Saudi Arabia in 1991.

Everett Historical/Shutterstock

Grumman F-14 Tomcat

The F-14 was made famous by the 1986 Tom Cruise movie *Top Gun*. It was developed to protect Navy ships from long-range Soviet bombers and patrol aircraft. With its long-range air-to-air missiles, the F-14 could take on enemy aircraft 90 miles away. Variable-geometry wings allowed it to operate at different speeds, depending on the mission.

Grumman delivered the first F-14s to the Navy in 1972. The aircraft fought its first combat in 1981, when F-14s downed two Soviet-built Libyan MiG-23s over the Gulf of Sidra. F-14s flew many missions in the Gulf War, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Although the Navy retired the Tomcat in 2006, the plane still serves with the Iranian Air Force. The United States sold the planes to the Shah of Iran before he was overthrown in 1979 and his government replaced by the Islamic Republic of Iran. An Iranian pilot is the highest-scoring F-14 ace, having shot down 11 enemy planes during the Iran-Iraq War (1980 to 1988).

The Tomcat could fly up to 1,544 mph. It carried a crew of two, a cannon, and up to eight air-to-air missiles. Its range was 2,400 miles. Grumman produced 712 F-14s.



MiG-23 on display at an air base in Kubinka, Russia

ID1974/Shutterstock

Mikoyan Gurevich MiG-23/27

The Soviets designed the MiG-23 to replace the MiG-21. The new plane was extremely successful—it was widely used by the Soviet Union, its Warsaw Pact allies, and many other countries for several decades. It had a more powerful engine and was the first Soviet aircraft with variable-geometry wings. The original MiG-23 was a fighter-interceptor aircraft. Its later sibling, the MiG-27, was developed as a strike fighter-bomber.

The MiG-23 was first delivered to the Soviet Union and India in 1975. Russia retired the aircraft in 1994, but it served in India until

2009 and continued with several other air forces after that. It had a maximum speed of 1,553 mph and a range of 808 miles. The standard MiG-23 carried a twin-barrel cannon and 6,600 lbs. of missiles. About 5,050 MiG-23s were produced.

The MiG-27 was armed with a six-barreled machine gun and could carry up to 8,000 lbs. of bombs and missiles. Some 1,075 MiG-27s were built.

Lockheed MC-130E Combat Talon

The MC-130E Combat Talon provides the Air Force with an aircraft that can infiltrate and resupply special operations forces in hostile or enemy territory. To **infiltrate** is to *secretly enter or join something, such as a group or country, to gain information or do harm.*

MC-130s can fly well below radar coverage, avoiding detection in any type of weather condition. The MC-130 can also refuel other aircraft in flight. It first flew in 1966 and has seen service during the Vietnam War and every operation since.



An MC-130 Combat Talon like the one used for *Operation Eagle Claw* prepares to refuel aircraft near Japan.

Courtesy US Air Force

Lockheed C-141 Starlifter

The C-141 Starlifter was the Air Force's first major jet aircraft designed to meet military standards as a troop and cargo carrier. Lockheed (now Lockheed Martin) built a total of 285 C-141s. For more than 40 years, C-141s performed numerous airlift missions for the Air Force. With its great range and high speed, the Starlifter projected American military power and humanitarian efforts rapidly across the globe.

The Starlifter originated from a 1959 requirement for a fast, strategic transport aircraft that would serve as a workhorse for moving Army troops rapidly anywhere in the world. The C-141 made its maiden flight on 17 December 1963. The aircraft became operational in April 1965.



A C-141B Starlifter like the one used in *Operation Urgent Fury* flies over the Pacific Ocean with San Francisco in the background.

Ken Hackman/Courtesy US Air Force

Humanitarian Operations

Participating in humanitarian operations is a tradition older than the Air Force. It will continue as long as natural disasters and political crises create human suffering. People's need for emergency assistance can arise at any time. It can result from many causes, from earthquakes to civil war. America's military has stepped forward on countless occasions to provide medical assistance, food, and water at a moment's notice.

As early as 1919, air service airplanes dropped food to marooned flood victims along the Rio Grande River. During the 1920s, Army flyers bombed ice jams in Pennsylvania rivers to prevent flooding, restore safe navigation, and save bridges. In 1932 Army bombers dropped relief supplies to Navajo Indians in Arizona who were snowbound after severe blizzards. In the first 46 years since the US Air Force was established, it has conducted at least 490 relief airlift operations around the world.

The Berlin Airlift, *Operation Vittles*, is still the largest humanitarian airlift operation in history. In 15 months, US and allied planes flew 190,000 flights. They moved 1.75 million tons of coal, food, medicine, and other supplies into West Berlin. Air Force humanitarian efforts since then have continued in this time-honored tradition.

Operation Babylift and Operation Frequent Wind

Although all US combat troops departed South Vietnam in 1973, the war between North and South Vietnam was not over. In early 1975, the North Vietnamese Army launched a major attack that captured a number of provinces and cities in South Vietnam.

As the North Vietnamese army continued to move south, President Gerald Ford announced on 3 April 1975 that US aircraft would carry South Vietnamese orphans to the United States. This became known as *Operation Babylift*. The operation began tragically, however, when an Air Force C-5 Galaxy carrying more than 200 orphans and 37 Defense Department employees crashed shortly after takeoff, killing 155 of the 330 people on board. While the crash slowed the evacuation, *Operation Babylift* ultimately brought more than 2,600 orphans out of Vietnam to safety.

While *Operation Babylift* continued, C-141s were used to evacuate US citizens and dependents. By 19 April, US aircraft had flown out 6,000 people, including a number of Vietnamese-born US dependents—the spouses and children of US citizens. During the month of April 1975, the Air Force flew 201 C-141 and 174 C-130 missions to evacuate more than 45,000 people from South Vietnam. This included 5,600 US citizens.

Still, the US ambassador, his staff, and many more US citizens and refugees remained in South Vietnam. They would have to be evacuated by helicopter, in an operation known as *Frequent Wind*. US Marine helicopters were joined by 10 helicopters from the Air Force. Their flights marked the first significant deployment of Air Force helicopters from a US Navy aircraft carrier. In addition, Navy and Air Force fighters flew escort for the helicopters, while Air Force AC-130 gunships and KC-135 tankers provided additional support.

In dangerous circumstances, 71 US helicopters flew 660 missions between Saigon and the US Seventh Fleet. They evacuated more than 7,800 people from the US Embassy on 29 and 30 April. The operation ended on 30 April, and by noon that day, Communist flags flew over the Presidential Palace. On that final day, Air Force aircraft flew a total of 1,422 missions.

Operation Frequent Wind concluded more than two decades of US involvement in Vietnam. Although the evacuation of South Vietnam had ended, the Air Force still had to transport thousands of tons of cargo to refugee camps and move refugees from the Philippines to Guam. By the middle of May 1975, Guam harbored more than 50,000 Southeast Asian evacuees. The evacuation concluded with *Operation New Life* and *Operation New Arrivals*, which brought approximately 130,000 refugees to the United States. The aerial evacuation of South Vietnam was the largest such operation in history, with more than 50,000 evacuees transported mainly on Air Force aircraft.



Vietnam, the Philippines, and Guam

Hurricane Katrina Relief Operations

Hurricane Katrina, with winds as high as 140 miles per hour, made landfall near Buras, Louisiana, on 29 August 2005. It devastated parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The dense population of New Orleans was hardest hit. Floodwalls and levees failed, leaving about 80 percent of the city flooded for weeks. Nearly 100,000 residents struggled to survive as they awaited rescue.

Working with the Coast Guard and other agencies, Air Force helicopters played a key role during relief operations, particularly in New Orleans. They not only flew damage assessment teams into ravaged areas, but also performed extensive search-and-rescue operations. Using MH-53 Pave Low, HH-60 Pave Hawk, and UH-1 helicopters from bases across the country, the Air Force rescued 4,322 of the approximately 30,000 people saved. In one day, the members of the 347th Expeditionary Rescue Group rescued 791 people. In addition to rescuing survivors, the Air Force deployed Air National Guard Expeditionary Medical Support teams for the first time in a domestic crisis. These teams were set up in New Orleans, Gulfport, Mississippi, and Hancock County, Mississippi.



An Air Force pararescueman holds a child as they are lifted to safety during Hurricane Katrina search-and-rescue operations.

Courtesy US Air Force

The Air Force also flew hundreds of missions using C-130s, C-17s, C-5s, and KC-135s to airlift people, equipment, and supplies into and out of the region. Air Force aircraft transported 43,713 support personnel into the area. The Air Force sent personnel to New Orleans International Airport to establish a base of operations. It also evacuated 2,602 patients from areas affected by Katrina.

In addition, the Air Force transported 26,943 people to temporary homes in more than 35 states. In one of the largest such missions, 89 aircraft airlifted nearly 10,000 refugees to Lackland AFB, Texas, in one 55-hour period. The Air Force also performed other flying missions, including spraying insecticide to help prevent disease outbreaks. E-3 AWACS aircraft performed air traffic control for more than 1,000 helicopters. And U-2 reconnaissance aircraft overflew the area, providing aerial imagery of affected areas. In total, the Air Force flew 4,743 missions in support of Hurricane Katrina relief operations.

Operation Tomodachi

On 11 March 2011, a 9.0-magnitude earthquake occurred off the northern coast of Japan. It caused a massive tsunami that devastated parts of the country. A **tsunami** is *a very high, large wave in the ocean that is usually caused by an earthquake under the sea*. As many as 28,000 people were killed or missing. Millions of dollars worth of property was damaged.

It was one of the worst natural disasters in Japan's history. The US Geological Survey considered the earthquake to be the fourth largest in the world since 1900—and the largest in Japan for at least 130 years. While the Japanese government immediately responded, the US government stood ready to help.

As part of *Operation Tomodachi* (*friend* in Japanese), the Air Force sent HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopters to conduct search-and-rescue operations. Air Force C-17 Globemaster IIs ferried supplies, personnel, and equipment to Japan. KC-10 Extenders provided aerial refueling. In addition, C-130 Hercules transports delivered cargo and supplies, and conducted reconnaissance over devastated areas.

The status of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant was of great concern during the recovery efforts. It had been damaged by the tsunami. Experts worried that a massive radiation leak could affect the already-devastated region. To determine the extent of the damage, the Air Force sent U-2 Dragon Lady and RQ-4 Global Hawk aircraft to conduct reconnaissance of the damaged plant.

In the first two weeks of *Operation Tomodachi*, the Air Force flew 225 missions. It transported 4.2 million lbs. of cargo and approximately 2,800 people. Although the loss of life and property was tragic, Air Force contributions to the relief effort built firmly on its own tradition of humanitarian-assistance missions that began with the Berlin Airlift.



Map of Japan showing the location of the 2011 earthquake and its closeness to the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant

Augusto Cabral/Shutterstock

Humanitarian operations demonstrate that US military organizations have useful roles beyond the battlefield. Military operations can not only wage combat and destruction against enemies of the US and its allies—they can also save lives, repair, and rebuild. US military forces have a proud tradition of helping those who can't help themselves during and after disasters, a tradition that will continue.

How the Cold War Ended

In the decades of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union never fought face to face. Neither side used nuclear weapons. They avoided total war.

But each side spent billions of dollars building up arms. This meant billions of dollars weren't going toward the everyday needs of civilians: better schools, better roads, and better power plants. This failure to pay attention to its people's needs severely weakened the Soviet Union.

The country's economy suffered. People had to wait in line to buy basic foods, such as bread. The people in the Communist countries of Europe also began to demand more respect for human rights. They wanted freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the freedom to travel to other countries.

The Cold War came to a critical point in 1989. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had come to power in 1985. He tried to reform the Communist system by freeing the economy and improving human rights. But the effort came too late for Soviet communism. The Soviets' Eastern European allies saw their Communist governments fall one by one. In most cases, democracies took their place. East Germany and West Germany reunited into one democratic country. The Warsaw Pact dissolved.

The Soviet Union itself had been organized into 15 republics. The majority of the populations of the 14 republics outside the Russian republic were not ethnic Russians. By January 1991, the republics of Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, and Lithuania had declared their independence from the Soviet Union. In a March 1991 election, the residents of most of the other Soviet republics voted to make the Soviet Union a federation of independent republics with a common president, military, and foreign policy. Gorbachev negotiated a new union treaty and planned to sign it in August.

Before he could do so, however, several other Soviet officials attempted a coup d'état. They placed Gorbachev under arrest at his vacation house and tried to seize the government. But the citizens of Moscow, led by Russian republic President Boris Yeltsin, barricaded the "White House," the Russian republic's capitol building. The coup fell apart and Gorbachev returned to Moscow. The coup plotters were arrested.

Reaction to the coup from the other Soviet republics was swift. One by one they declared their independence. Gorbachev was unable to stop the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It broke apart into 15 independent countries, including Russia.

The Soviet Union ceased to exist on 26 December 1991. After four decades of tension, the contest of wills was over. The United States and its democratic allies in NATO had outlasted communism in Europe.

The Cold War's Aftermath

Some people thought the Cold War's end would bring a long period of peace. But instead, the ending of the Cold War ushered in a whole new era of regional conflicts. In a few countries of Africa and Central Asia, weak governments allowed terrorist groups to organize and train. Russia itself suffered economic and political difficulties and disputes with some of the former Soviet republics. In southern Europe, Yugoslavia—a mixture of ethnic groups divided into five republics—began to fall apart. These developments would challenge the United States and NATO in much different ways than the Cold War did.

✓ CHECKPOINTS

Lesson 4 Review

Using complete sentences, answer the following questions on a sheet of paper.

1. Why was the mission to rescue the American hostages in Iran canceled?
2. What did Congress do after the failed rescue mission?
3. Why did President Reagan send US troops to Grenada?
4. What flaws did *Operation Urgent Fury* reveal in US joint command?
What did Congress do in response?
5. What caused President Reagan to authorize *Operation El Dorado Canyon*?
6. What did the operation show?
7. What did President George H. W. Bush say was the purpose of *Operation Just Cause*?
8. What happened to General Manuel Noriega?
9. By the final day, how many missions were flown for *Operations Babylift* and *Frequent Wind*?
10. What was the magnitude of the earthquake that hit northern Japan?
11. What factors led to the end of the Soviet Union?
12. When did the Soviet Union cease to exist?

APPLYING YOUR LEARNING

13. The Cold War lasted for four decades before the Soviet Union collapsed.
What lessons might you learn from what caused this collapse?