U.S. FOREIGN POLICY CRISSES, 1989–2019

The Center for Preventive Action (CPA) at the Council on Foreign Relations compiled the following list of U.S. foreign policy crises since the end of the Cold War (November 1989) according to these criteria:

• The triggering event or series of events is perceived as a threat to U.S. interests or values such that it may warrant the use of U.S. armed forces to protect them.

• The perception of threat is sufficient to attract high level U.S. government attention (deputies level and above) principally, but not exclusively, in the executive branch.

• Decision-making is driven by a strong sense of urgency based on the belief that there is a finite or optimal time frame to respond. It can also be accompanied by considerable uncertainty about the nature of the threatening event(s) and what action to take in response, owing to doubts about efficacy and cost.

An initial list of crises was produced using datasets generated by Duke University’s International Crisis Behavior project, the Correlates of War project, and the U.S. government-sponsored Political Instability Task Force, as well as conflict background briefs and lists from the Congressional Research Service and RAND Corporation that tabulate cases of U.S. military deployments since the Cold War. Additional sources were also consulted, including U.S. government press releases and other communiques, as well as the memoirs of presidents and senior government officials. This list runs to the beginning of October 2019, but because CPA relied on publicly available press
releases and unclassified reports to determine whether an event mer-
ited inclusion in its list of crises, the final list may not include recent or
still classified events.

The final list clearly reflects CPA’s judgment about which crises to
include or exclude. In particular, CPA included certain humanitarian
crises and natural disasters for which the deployment of U.S. military
personnel was deemed important to securing U.S. interests. However,
CPA did not include crises that were precipitated by economic events,
even though they might have had an international dimension; in almost
all such cases, the use of military force was irrelevant or uncalled for.
CPA also excluded many terrorist attacks and related incidents involv-
ing U.S. forces as well as U.S. allies and partners, assessing that these
events were part of the global war on terror following the September
11, 2001, attacks on the United States. These events are already cov-
ered comprehensively in other databases.2

Deciding whether some events are discrete enough to warrant being
listed individually or should be classified as part of a single, prolonged
crisis, is also a subjective call. For example, some experts could justifi-
ably argue that the various events related to the Balkans in the 1990s
constituted one long crisis. The same rationale applies to episodic
events related to North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons and
long-range missiles and for the ongoing conflict in Syria. For some
crises, CPA chose to distinguish between different events of the same
provenance because they triggered an urgent reassessment of U.S.
policy and thus justified treatment as separate crises. In addition, for
crises that could be linked to multiyear events, such as the European
refugee crisis, CPA selected the year of the crisis based on when it trig-
ger the most urgent alarm in the U.S. government.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Attempted coup in the Philippines against Corazon Aquino</td>
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<td>U.S. invasion of Panama</td>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>India-Pakistan nuclear crisis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>First Liberian Civil War</td>
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<td>Iraq’s invasion and occupation of Kuwait</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>Bosnian and Croat independence movements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Uprisings in northern and southern Iraq</td>
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<td>Breakup of Yugoslavia</td>
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<td>Attempted coup against Mikhail Gorbachev</td>
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<td>Coup in Haiti</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>Coup in Sierra Leone</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Coup and famine in Somalia</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>George H.W. Bush</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Bill Clinton</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Terrorist bombing attack on World Trade Center in New York</td>
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<td>Assassination attempt on George H.W. Bush in Kuwait</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Russian constitutional crisis</td>
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<td>First Battle of Mogadishu, Somalia</td>
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<td>Coup in Burundi</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>Siege of Sarajevo</td>
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<td>Rwandan genocide</td>
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<td></td>
<td>North Korean nuclear crisis</td>
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<td>Iraqi threats to Kuwait</td>
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<td>Chechnya secession and First Chechen War</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>Attack on UN safe haven in Srebrenica and Srebrenica massacre</td>
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<td></td>
<td>China-Taiwan crisis</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>Unrest in Liberia</td>
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<td>Israeli military intervention in Lebanon</td>
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<td>Armed mutinies in Central African Republic</td>
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<td>Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td>Iraqi offensive in Kurdistan</td>
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<td>North Korean submarine infiltration</td>
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Bill Clinton (cont.)

1997  Rebellion in Albania
      Civil war in Sierra Leone
      Coup in Cambodia
      Armed conflict in Congo-Brazzaville

1998  Serbian invasion of Kosovo
      Eritrea-Ethiopia border war
      India and Pakistan nuclear tests
      Second Congo War
      U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania
      North Korean missile test over Sea of Japan
      Violent unrest in Liberia
      Hurricane Mitch in Central America

1999  Atrocities in Kosovo
      India-Pakistan conflict in Kargil
      Second Chechen War
      Independence of East Timor
      Flash floods in northern Venezuela

2000  Ethiopian offensive against Eritrea
      Bombing of the USS Cole

George W. Bush

2001  Hainan Island incident in the South China Sea
      9/11 attacks
      Twin Peaks crisis between India and Pakistan

2002  Insurgency in southern Philippines
      Military unrest in Ivory Coast

2003  Genocide in Darfur, Sudan
      Alleged Iraqi violations of weapons of mass destruction prohibitions
      Second Liberian civil war

2004  Coup in Haiti
      Indian Ocean tsunami

2005  Earthquake in Kashmir
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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</table>
| 2006 | Iranian nuclear enrichment  
Second Lebanese War  
First North Korean nuclear test |
| 2007 | Construction of Syrian nuclear reactor  
Electoral violence in Kenya |
| 2008 | Sri Lankan Civil War  
Russia–Georgia War  
Conflict in Gaza |
| 2009 | North Korean nuclear test  
Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula threats in Yemen |
| 2010 | Earthquake in Haiti  
Sinking of the South Korean naval ship Cheonan  
Second Kyrgyz Revolution  
Flooding in Pakistan  
Bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island in the South China Sea |
| 2011 | Violent unrest in Egypt  
Post-election violence in Ivory Coast  
Threat of mass atrocities in Libya  
Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in Japan  
Violent crackdown in Syria |
| 2012 | Coup in Mali  
Scarborough Shoal standoff in the South China Sea  
Attack on U.S. embassy in Benghazi, Libya  
Conflict in Gaza  
Seizure of Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo |
| 2013 | North Korean nuclear test  
Mass atrocities in Central African Republic  
Chemical weapons attack in Damascus, Syria  
Civil war in South Sudan |
| 2014 | Russia-Ukraine conflict  
Boko Haram attacks in northern Nigeria  
Islamic State operations in Iraq and Syria |
Barack Obama (cont.)

2014  Conflict in Gaza
       Ebola outbreak in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone
       Islamic State mass atrocities against Yazidis

2015  Boko Haram attacks in Cameroon
       Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen
       Violent unrest in Burundi
       European refugee crisis
       Russian intervention in Syrian civil war

2016  North Korean nuclear test
       Russian interference in U.S. presidential elections
       Violent clashes in Juba, South Sudan
       Coup attempt in Turkey
       North Korean nuclear test
       Missile attacks against USS Mason

Donald J. Trump

2017  Chemical weapons attack in Khan Shaykhun, Syria
       WannaCry ransomware attack
       Islamic State seizure of Marawi, Philippines
       Saudi-led blockade of Qatar
       North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile test
       Mass atrocities in Rakhine State, Myanmar
       North Korean nuclear test
       Ambush of U.S. soldiers in Niger

2018  Turkish offensive in Afrin, Syria
       Chemical weapons attack in Douma, Syria

2019  Political and social unrest in Venezuela
       India-Pakistan border skirmishes
       Violent unrest in Sudan
       U.S. confrontation with Iran