

What Remains After the Wall's Fall

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall it is not a matter of dispute that the removal of that evil edifice was a good thing. It should be equally uncontentious that its collapse was primarily the result of the Russians themselves trying to overcome the impasse of their tragic 20th-century history. In the words of Jean-Pierre Chevènement, France's defense minister at the time, "let us not forget, it was Russia that put an end to communism... It was [Mikhail] Gorbachev who, in 1989, for largely internal reasons, took the decision to remove from power the regime of [East German leader] Erich Honecker in East Berlin."

The dismantling of the Wall started in the summer of 1989, when Gorbachev encouraged Hungary's reformist leaders to remove the deadly obstacles along the border with Austria. Tens of thousands of East Germans duly poured into the gap and crossed into the West. Two months later, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the German Democratic Republic, the Soviet leader told his stunned hosts that history punishes those who ignore the signs of the times. Honecker was soon replaced; mass protests broke out in Dresden and Leipzig and spread across the country like wildfire. Devoid of support from Moscow the regime started imploding. On Nov. 9 the wall was breached. West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl skillfully maneuvered the reunification process and ensured swift departure of Soviet troops.

This was not the "end of history," in Francis Fukuyama's phrase. It did perhaps look like the end of Europe's civil war which had started in July 1914 and, after the doomed Versailles interlude, continued with fresh ferocity in 1939.

Bush I's Secretary of State James Baker told Gorbachev that

NATO would not extend its 1990 boundary further east. But this was not to be. Instead of declaring victory and abolishing NATO in the early 1990s, the Clinton administration redesigned it as a mechanism for open-ended out-of-area interventions, even though every rationale for its existence had disappeared. Following the air war against Serbia in the spring of 1999, NATO's area of operations became unlimited, and its "mandate" entirely self-generated. President Clinton's selectively applied doctrine of "humanitarian intervention" denied the validity of long-established norms that hark back to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. He paved the way for the pernicious Bush II doctrine of preventive war and "regime change," with tragic consequences for all.

Today NATO remains the pillar and self-referential framework for the policy of permanent global interventionism. Its upholders try to prevent any meaningful debate about the correlation between ends and means of American power at a time when the global distribution of power is characterized by asymmetric multipolarity.

The brief period of monopolar global dominance by the U.S. which followed the collapse of Soviet power proves beyond reasonable doubt that attempts by a would-be hegemon to keep its military strength beyond challenge are inherently destabilizing. Neither Napoleon nor Hitler knew any "natural" limits, but their ambition was confined to Europe. The U.S. concept of full-spectrum dominance extends its military concerns literally across the whole world. It was always bound to be resisted by China, Russia, and various lesser powers, acting in accordance with the realist principles of state sovereignty and national interest.

The two dominant strains of political thought in Washington, the neoliberal and the neoconservative, have gelled into the third heir of what Oswald Spengler presciently described a century ago as *The Decline of the West*. They share with communism and fascism the same moral relativism. Their dictum

that humans could be transformed by the political process was not defeated with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The globalist-interventionist mindset is symptomatic of the crisis of Western civilization as such. The result is a malaise at the very core of Western foreign policy, and notably on both sides of the Deep State duopoly in Washington. At its poles there may be differences over tactics and means, but the alleged necessity of America's continued, open-ended "engagement" in upholding the "rules-based international order" must not be questioned. Neocons and neolibers share the arrogant belief that enlightened abstractions ("our values") can be spread across the world, and enforced by the boots on the ground, forever.

This utopian impulse in foreign policy is neurotic. Three decades after the collapse of the Soviet empire it reflects a diseased society's collective loss of nerve, faith, and identity. It may yet be challenged, as candidate Trump tried to do in 2016. As it happens, President Trump's current trials are not only his. He may not be aware of the fact, but their outcome will be as momentous for America's future as was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

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