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The fall of the Berlin Wall: A Pyrrhic victory

The Berlin Wall fell 25 years ago.

By Bruce Fein

11/2/2014

It was a Pyrrhic victory.

It was the beginning of the end of the American republic, and the end of the beginning of the American empire.

The Cold War victory left the United States with no rival superpower to teach us daily what we were not. So we embraced practices emblematic of the Soviet Union, for instance, detention without accusation or trial or indiscriminate spying on citizens without warrants.

We no longer needed to compete for world influence by example in lieu of force. So we became arrogant, neurotically risk-averse, and thrilled by objectless, purposeless domination for the sake of domination.

The United States paradoxically came to resemble the global tyranny the Cold War was fought to defeat because of its Cold War triumph.

The fall of the Wall, followed by the 1991 disintegration of the Soviet Empire, gave birth to intellectual swooning over the grandiosity of the United States and the invincibility of Western liberal democracy. Francis Fukuyama was cheered to the rafters for effusing in The End of

History and the Last Man: "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."

But Fukuyama proved no more prophetic than Karl Marx's discerning a withering away of the state.

A 1992 draft of a Defense Department document authored by Paul Wolfowitz urged U.S. military force pre-emptively to destroy any pre-embryonic new rival.

In 1997, William Kristol and Robert Kagan founded the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). It attracted, among others, Mr. Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Richard Perle -- an all-star roster of neo-cons. The PNAC bugled the U.S. military to play the same role abroad as the cavalry played on the American frontier: "... [W]e cannot safely avoid the responsibilities of global leadership or the costs that are associated with its exercise ... we need to promote the cause of political and economic freedom abroad; we need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity and our principles."

Few if any in the nation's political leadership asked then or later why U.S. global domination achieved not through the peaceful influence of example but through the sword would advance justice or promote an elevated moral order. None ever inquired whether the U.S. obelisk to liberty was less grandiose and electrifying when it was no more than 13 states on the Atlantic Ocean without a single military base or soldier abroad.

And then came the predictable gratuitous wars and spiraling national debt.

We evicted Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991 to reinstate a tyrannical dynasty. We dispatched troops to Somalia to alleviate a humanitarian crisis and got Black Hawk Down and the Al Shabab terrorist organization.

We rained bombs on Bosnia and got an ethnically partitioned nation between Muslims, Croats, and Serbs.

We initiated war against Serbia over Kosovo and set a precedent for Russian President Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea.

We continued war in Afghanistan long after the perpetrators of 9/11 had been killed or captured.

We invaded Iraq in 2003 and joined its sequel internecine war against the Islamic State in 2014.

We have carried the global, perpetual war against international terrorism to Pakistan, Yemen, Nigeria, Syria, the Philippines, and elsewhere.

We endowed the president of the United States with power to exterminate any person on the planet whom he decrees based on secret, uncorroborated evidence may endanger the national security now or in the future.

We have embraced the trappings of the British Empire that provoked the American Revolution.

This would not have transpired had the Cold War not left the United States unrivaled.

Whom the Gods would destroy they first intoxicate with limitless power.

Was our Cold War victory worth it?