

## The Gift of Berlin

“The Fall of Berlin and the Rise of a Myth” by Donald E. Shepardson, in *The Journal of Military History* (Jan. 1998), Society for Military History, George C. Marshall Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Va. 24450–1600.

Almost as soon as Soviet troops hoisted their flag over the Reichstag building in Berlin on April 30, 1945, a myth arose that only American naiveté (in contrast with British realism) had prevented British and American forces from taking the German capital first. Former secretary of state Henry Kissinger

month had encountered fanatical Japanese resistance, and the atom bomb’s effectiveness was still unknown. Moreover, the Allied leaders were reluctant to alienate Joseph Stalin. They were counting on Soviet support in the war against Japan. A confrontation over Berlin would have shocked the American public, which had come to look on the Soviet Union as a gallant ally. In Britain, it would have split Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s coalition government, since his Labor Party partners would never have supported it.

In a 17-day campaign that began on April 16, the Red Army captured Berlin, paying a huge cost: 80,000 dead or missing, 280,000 wounded, 2,000 artillery pieces destroyed, and more than 900 aircraft lost. But Stalin also felt constrained by the need to maintain a united front against Japan, and thus did not challenge his allies over the division of Berlin to which they had agreed at Yalta in February. In



In 1945, as World War II drew to a close, war-weary Americans were in no mood to confront their Soviet ally over Berlin.

July, American, British, and French forces took possession of their respective zones. “Here was a gift,” Shepardson says.

recently expressed this view in his 1994 book *Diplomacy*. Shepardson, a historian at the University of Northern Iowa, replies that, faced with hard choices amid the rush of events in the spring of 1945, General Dwight D. Eisenhower and his superiors were more realistic than their later critics.

Eisenhower finally decided on April 14, 1945, to halt his forces at the Elbe River, 50 miles west of Berlin. The United States, Shepardson notes, wanted to defeat Germany quickly with minimum casualties, not only for humane reasons but so that U.S. troops could be deployed to the Pacific, where the situation appeared grim. The invasion of Okinawa that

The gift—which bedeviled Stalin and his heirs for the next 45 years—would not have been necessary if the Soviets had attacked Berlin before the Yalta Conference. By the end of January 1945, the Red Army was camped less than 50 miles from Berlin. But Stalin decided to pause. In later years, Shepardson dryly notes, Soviet critics would fault Marshal Georgi Zhukov for not persuading Stalin to press on. The two Soviet leaders, the critics said, should have been more realistic.

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## The Present Danger

“Global Utopias and Clashing Civilizations: Misunderstanding the Present” by John Gray, in *International Affairs* (Jan. 1998), Chatham House, 10 St. James’s Square, London SW1Y 4LE, England.

The end of the Cold War has transformed the world—but not in the ways por-

trayed by two prominent scholarly prophets, contends Gray, a professor of European

thought at the London School of Economics. What is different—and dangerous—today, Gray maintains, is “the new weakness of states.”

Francis Fukuyama’s famous 1992 prediction that liberal democracies will eventually prevail everywhere is unlikely ever to come true, Gray argues. He offers one simple reason: it is not whether a government is a liberal democracy that determines its legitimacy, but whether it meets the most fundamental needs of its citizens, namely, protection from “the worst evils: war and civil disorder, criminal violence, and lack of the means of decent subsistence.”

And contrary to Samuel Huntington’s 1993 “clash of civilizations” thesis, wars are still “commonly waged between (and within) nationalities and ethnicities, not between different civilizations,” Gray observes. “[The] old, familiar logic of territories and alliances often impels members of the same ‘civilization’ into enmity and members of different ‘civilizations’ into making common cause.” After armed conflict broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1988, for instance, such logic drove Iran to side with Christian Armenia, not Islamic Azerbaijan.

Fukuyama’s and Huntington’s “apocalyptic beliefs” only encourage the disabling illusion “that the difficult choices and unpleasant trade-offs that have always been necessary in the relations of states will someday be redundant,” Gray says. But

they are unavoidable, he declares. “Advancing democracy does not always foster political stability. Preserving peace does not always coincide with the promotion of human rights.”

In a variety of ways, Gray argues, the end of the Cold War rivalry has dangerously undermined the legitimacy of states. Some states, deprived of their strategic value, must make do without the outside support that previously sustained them. In other nations, such as Italy and Japan, the disappearance of Cold War imperatives has led to the disintegration of long-established political arrangements.

Economic globalization, encouraged by the collapse of the Soviet Union, has made it harder for governments of all kinds to limit the economic risks to their citizens that come with free markets, creating “a new politics of economic insecurity.” Thanks in part to the unregulated trade in arms in the global economy, Gray notes, many modern states are unable to maintain a monopoly on organized violence. “Today wars are often not fought by agents of sovereign states but waged by political organizations, irregular armies, ethnic or tribal militias and other bodies.”

“We have inherited from the totalitarian era a reflex of suspicion of government,” Gray concludes. “Yet no political doctrine could be less suited to the needs of our time than that which is embodied in the cult of the minimum state.”

## ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

### *The Perils of Europe’s Promised Union*

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

European union—not just a common market but a common currency, a common defense, and a common diplomacy—has been talked about for decades,” Ronald Steel, author of *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (1980), notes in the *New Republic* (June 1, 1998). “In fact, the talk lasted so long that union came to resemble the kingdom of heaven: something to be devoutly desired but deferred into the indefinitely receding future. Many, myself included, doubted that European countries would ever scrap that essential attribute of

sovereignty—their currencies—as the price of unity.” But now, 11 European nations are doing just that.

Mere months from now, on January 1, 1999, if all goes according to plan, France, Germany, and the other nine countries in the European Monetary Union (EMU) will freeze their exchange rates, establishing, in effect, a single currency. People and companies will be able to write checks, use credit cards, and keep bank accounts in euros. Responsibility for monetary policy will shift from Germany’s Bundesbank and the other