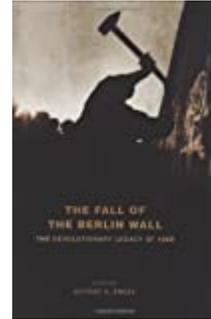




**Jeffrey A. Engel, ed.** *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 208 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-538910-4.



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## To 1989 and Beyond!: The Fall of the Wall and Its Legacies

The twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall sparked a flurry of new works examining the remarkable transformations of 1989. This volume, the result of a January 2009 conference sponsored by Texas A&M University's Scowcroft Institute for International Affairs, brings together several essays that address how global leaders interpreted the heady days of 1989 and how they responded to the unprecedented challenges and opportunities they faced. The book also offers insightful analysis of the legacies of the wall's fall and how these events have shaped the twenty-first century world. Approaching the fall of the wall from the perspective of four leading powers (the United States, Soviet Union, Europe, and China), this volume underscores the long-term reforms that facilitated these momentous changes as well as their continuing impact.

In his introduction, Jeffrey Engel reminds us that the story of 1989 has typically been presented as one dominated by ordinary citizens. Popular unrest spread from Poland and Hungary to East Germany, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia, and reached Romania over the course of

a few short months. Yet, the opinions and actions of the world's statesmen, Engel argues, are not as well understood. Although these elites may not have had absolute control over the many popular movements that emerged, they did continue to wield surprisingly tremendous influence. Related to this focus on policymakers and elites is Engel's emphasis on the power of personality in history. Nowhere is this point made more clearly than in the discussion of Mikhail Gorbachev and his efforts to save socialism in the Soviet Union. More than anything or anyone else, argues Engel, Gorbachev was the key ingredient in the making of 1989. His policies (most notably *glasnost* and *perestroika*), his language (stressing "equal security" and a "common European home"), and his personal beliefs (especially his great reluctance to use force) signaled a sea change in Cold War relations.

Following the introduction, the volume contains four chapters, each of which examines the policymakers of a major Cold War power center. James Sheehan's essay concentrates on the Europeans' role in a world dominated by the two superpowers. Instead of limiting his

analysis to European politicians, Sheehan stresses the power of Europe “as an idea, an aspiration, and a historical example” (p. 37). It was the Europeans’ renunciation of war as a political instrument and their new supranational institutions that proved to be their greatest contribution to the demise of the Soviet empire. After providing an examination of the foreign policy of the two German states, Soviet relations with Western Europe, and the anxieties surrounding reunification in 1990, Sheehan returns to the attraction of the idea of Europe. It is, Sheehan intimates, no coincidence that the European Union embarked on a path of deepened integration in the 1990s and expanded to include a host of new members (including several former Soviet satellites and three Baltic republics in 2004). Not even a reunified Germany and the end of the Cold War could uproot the forces that had transformed European domestic and international politics since 1945 (p. 63).

William Taubman and Svetlana Savranskaya provide a fascinating glimpse into the internal calculations of Mikhail Gorbachev in their essay on the Soviet Union. Why did Gorbachev not respond more decisively after the wall fell? How could he not have foreseen German reunification on western terms and its future NATO membership? Taubman and Savranskaya offer a two-part explanation for the enigmatic responses of Gorbachev in the days and weeks following November 9. First, they argue that he was greatly distracted by the challenges of keeping his own house in order. In addition to serious economic problems, Gorbachev was also addressing discontent in the Baltic republics, Georgia, and Ukraine. Second, in light of the relationships he had forged with western leaders prior to the autumn of 1989, Gorbachev misunderstood the ramifications of the wall’s fall for Germany, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union. Gorbachev thrived on the support and respect he received from western political elites, and he believed their many promises regarding Soviet security concerns on the continent. Seeing the fall of the wall as one of several border changes of 1989 (such as the breaching of the fence separating Hungary and Austria), Gorbachev trusted the reassurances of Helmut Kohl regarding their shared European interests and saw no reason for alarm. Thus, Gorbachev felt he had been betrayed when Kohl introduced his ten-point plan for reunification at the end of November 1989, without a single European power publicly objecting to the proposal.

In his essay on China’s experiences in 1989, Chen Jian explores the origins and consequences of the Tiananmen tragedy as well as its impact on Europe. This chapter

traces the development of China under Mao Zedong and the reforms of Deng Xiaoping in the decade prior to 1989. Most intriguing here is how Chen illuminates the many links between the events in Eastern Europe and China. Prior to Tiananmen, Deng and other Communist Party leaders drew important lessons from the concessions of the Polish government and the growth of Solidarity in Poland. Most notably, they resolved not to permit any opposition groups to gain a foothold in China. Chen also reminds us that journalists reporting on Gorbachev’s visit to Beijing in May 1989 provided much of the international news coverage of the Chinese students’ demonstrations. Furthermore, the condemnation of the international community following the Chinese crackdown made Gorbachev even less willing to use force in his own affairs. In comparing events in China and Eastern Europe, Chen discusses the differing role of nationalism in the two revolutionary situations. Whereas nationalism prompted the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, the Chinese Communist Party was able to maintain control over “the banner of nationalism and ... define the discourse of patriotism” (p. 125). Chen identifies this point as a key difference in the evolution of the events of 1989 in Asia and Europe. Chen concludes that, although the Communist Party survived the turmoil of that spring now more than twenty years past, it continues to face the problem of legitimizing its monopoly on political power.

The final chapter in this collection investigates how the end of the Cold War has influenced American foreign policy in the last two decades. Melvyn Leffler opens his essay with American images of the Cold War: the Berlin Airlift, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Ronald Reagan challenging Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall. For many Americans, these images underscore American determination, courage, and resilience, and ultimately, American victory over evil. For some Americans, Leffler argues, the Cold War vindicated U.S. policies and sparked greater interest in shaping the international system and spreading freedom and prosperity. George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, however, did not belong to this camp. Leffler asserts that both men saw the prudent and careful use of American military capabilities as the central lesson of America’s Cold War experience. George W. Bush drew different conclusions from the fall of the wall, and he began to speak about the need for America to move beyond the old Cold War policies of deterrence in promoting freedom and individual liberty. The events of 9/11 then transpired, just nine months into Bush’s first term. Eighteen months later, the United States found itself fighting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Yet, the imagery and symbolism