

On the Ruins of the Berlin Wall

From the Past to the Future

By [Dmitriy Baklin](#)

Region: [Europe](#)

Global Research, November 09, 2009

[Strategic Culture Foundation](#) 8 November
2009

Germany is celebrating the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, an event of enduring significance which transformed not only the German mentality but also the post-war European security system and the entire global architecture.

The operation aimed at constructing the Berlin Wall, code-named Chinese Wall II, was carefully planned and executed with remarkable promptness, and West Berlin found itself encircled by the 202-km concrete structure. Since August 13, 1961 the Wall – perhaps the best-known architectural piece of the Cold War epoch – became the symbol of the partitioned city for years.

In terms of the purpose of its existence the Berlin Wall was a complete analog of the Great Chinese Wall whose construction began in the III century BC (475-221). The Chinese Wall was meant to fortify the frontiers of the Chinese civilization and to help unite the enormous Empire. The second wall – described as the anti-fascist defensive structure at the interface of socialism and capitalism in the DDR – embodied for nearly three decades the frontier of the socialist world and separated the two worlds and socioeconomic systems. In this quality, the Berlin Wall turned into a symbol of stability sustained by confrontation in the era marked with the dormant conflict of the Western and the Eastern blocs.

US president J. Kennedy said about the Wall quite philosophically that the solution, however disturbing, was still better than a war, and at that time almost anybody could subscribe to the point of view. Having divided the world, the two socioeconomic systems with their blocs and the Wall between them had to find a way to coexist.

Later the logic of the global development changed the disposition. In the USSR the process of disintegration paralleled by the Perestroika talk was gathering momentum and Europe started to invoke the German unification theme. It became the key one during M. Gorbachev's June 1989 visit to Germany. Laying out his vision, German Chancellor H. Kohl said to the Soviet leader: "Like the Rhine River runs to the sea, history is moving naturally towards the unification of Germany. You could attempt to build a dumb on the river, but a flood would overrun it and the river would not stop. This is exactly the situation with the unification of the country. Of course, Mr. Gorbachev can freeze the process for years... In this case, no doubt, I would have no chance to live long enough to see the day. Nevertheless, the day of the German unification will come as inevitably as the Rhine River runs to the sea".

The dumb collapsed on November 9, 1989 when thousands of Berliners rushed to the Wall

checkpoints. The Wall which had kept the two part of Berlin apart for 28 year, 4 months, and 9 days fell. A unified Germany emerged on the map of the world and shortly took the leading role in the European security affairs...

Recently, on the eve of the 20th anniversary of the demise of the Berlin Wall, the German Chancellor addressed for the first time since 1957 both chambers of the US Congress. A. Merkel expressed gratitude to J. Kennedy for his famous saying that he was a Berliner, to R. Reagan who demanded that Gorbachev bring down the Wall, and to G. Bush (elder) who – against the will of France, Great Britain, Italy, and the USSR – greenlighted H. Kohl's unification plan. But the picture she painted was not exactly correct. No doubt, A. Merkel has serious reasons to thank the US. The truth is that R. Reagan's demand was a highlight of his acting career rather than served as political guidance for Gorbachev. G. Bush's role was different. He made numerous attempts to find out during the talks with his Soviet counterpart what stance Moscow would adopt in the case of German unification. Would the forces of the Soviet Western Group stay in barracks or try to be the Rhine dumb? Eventually he realized that no serious opposition from Gorbachev was to be expected.

In June, 1990 Gorbachev told G. Bush openly that he would agree to recognize the NATO membership of the unified Germany in case "such would be the will of the German people". Feeling more than just surprised G. Bush even asked Gorbachev to repeat what he had just said.

Obviously A. Merkel's statement that Bush "greenlighted" Kohl's plan does not reflect the reality quite adequately. The situation is even more peculiar with the positions of Great Britain and France.

British Prime Minister M. Thatcher told Gorbachev that the German unification would not be in the interests of Great Britain and Western Europe as a whole, and suggested abandoning the idea altogether. She opined that no overhaul of post-war borders in Europe was needed as destabilization would follow, security would be jeopardized, and all these things could not be allowed to happen. French President F. Mitterrand said a new united Germany would present an even greater threat than it did under Hitler. He believed the German unification would revitalize "bad" Germans who used to dominate Europe and would cause Europe to revert to the situation which existed before World War I...

These are the matters of the past. Currently the united Germany is a recognized European leader with great economic potential, political clout, and international prestige. Berlin largely defines the future of Europe.

Still, there is a particularly important lesson to be learned from the past two decades. The demise of the Berlin Wall failed to lay solid foundations for the pan-European security. Hopes of millions of Europeans to see a better world order have not come true. The wars and conflicts in Abkhazia, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iraq, Kosovo, Macedonia, Karabakh, former Yugoslavia, and South Ossetia showed that in the world without the stability sustained by the bipolar system there is no traditional respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of countries. Without the basic principles, force has become the main argument in international relations.

Lines from Goethe come to mind: *«Geld verloren – nichts verloren, Ehre verloren – viele*

verloren, Mut verloren – alles verloren, da waerst du besser nicht geboren» (When money is lost, nothing is lost. When honor is lost, everything is lost). It would be great if on November 9 the leaders of Europe and Russia find the political courage to not only admire the fruits of freedom on the ruins of the Berlin Wall, but also to make a real step towards ensuring their efficient protection in the future.

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