

History is now

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These are extraordinary times.

The precepts of the Wilsonian international order are being dismantled brick by brick. But the decline and fall have been in the making for some time. Many historical trends enjoy a lifespan of approximately 100 years. This one is no exception.

About 100 years ago, on June 28, 1914 Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the Habsburg throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was assassinated in Sarajevo by Serbian nationalists. This development unleashed the anti-imperial forces of self-determination, codified in Wilson's Fourteen Points, which would topple ancient empires and redraw maps, culminating with the First, then Second World War, the firebombing of Dresden and Tokyo that stretched the legal limits of warfare, as Little boy and Fat Man ushered in the nuclear age.

Some 100 years later, on March 19, 2014, Russia annexed Yalta, Crimea, snuffing out the very symbol of the post war international order. It would take 2 more years with Trump's victory that the wave of the "common man" would wash over the banks of the international order.

Let's dig a bit deeper between the twin bookmarks of history.

With the League of Nations arose the hope for a new collective governance of state-to-state hostilities. Even with the failure of Versailles, the interwar years were punctuated by the spirit of Locarno and the pluralistic cosmopolitanism of Weimar. Then just as the nascent globalization began to take shape arrived the rude interruptions of the occupation of the Rhineland and the illusions of Munich's "peace in our time." Any vestigial disillusionment was shattered at the forest of Katyn.

The end of World War II was the beginning of the American world order. With Yalta as the benchmark for international cooperation and the Bretton Woods system promulgated as the global economic arrangement, the Treaty of Paris created the European Coal and Steel Community on April 18, 1951. The progenitors of the European Union were Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Paul-Henri Spaak and Konrad Adenauer, Frenchmen and Germans, two people most responsible for the outbreak of the European conflict that engulfed the world.

The international order may have originated in the trenches of Verdun and the tables at Versailles but were forged in the hills of Kaesong and waves of Incheon. The hillbilly and untested Harry Truman demonstrated his mettle and proved his detractors wrong.

Guided by the cool elegance of Dean Acheson and the sober integrity of George Marshall, Truman kept the peace in Korea. If Berlin and its wall were the symbols of the Cold War, the 38th parallel and the DMZ of Korea were the unrelenting reality. The Korean War cemented European cohesion, putting the “O” in the North Atlantic Treaty.

Six friends, comprised of two lawyers, two bankers, and two diplomats, shaped the post-WWII international order, underwritten largely by the Marshall Plan. They were: Dean Acheson, Charles E. Bohlen, W. Averell Harriman, George F. Kennan, Robert A. Lovett, John McCloy. To this toxic mix of ego and talent were added McGeorge Bundy, Eugene and Walt Rostow, and Allen and John Foster Dulles. These white Anglo-Saxon males created this quintessential American order.

The Cold War was kept from becoming “hot” by the calculated irrationality of Curtis Lemay and the lethality of the Strategic Air Command. The hermeneutics of NSC-68, advances in game theory, the pioneering works of Herman Kahn, Bernard Brodie, Thomas Schelling, and Fred Ikle advanced the language and literature of nuclear deterrence. The liberal order was tested in the jungles of la Drang and Dak To and challenged in the halls of Bandung. MIRV, throw weight and SLBMs altered the nuclear algorithm as unequivocal fear buttressed geopolitical stability

Ten years before the sunset of the 20th century, the Berlin Wall came down, and proceeded to pull down the USSR with it. STRATCOM's 1995 seminal document on the "new" calculus of deterrence, "Essentials of Post-Cold War Deterrence," was largely ignored at the expense of nation building.

The void of a mortal nuclear armageddon was filled with conspicuous materialism. And indulge we did. Nations and generations were lifted out of poverty in an awesome display of unprecedented material wealth and tangible improvements in standard of living and health care and longevity. Malaria was banished to science textbooks.

But arrogance accompanied the progress of globalism. Personal computers, cell phones and derivatives fueled the excesses of consumerism. The 2008 financial crisis deepened the fault lines between the elite and the common man. Between 1991 and 2008, Main Street and the middle class were bereft of globalism's spoils. And those at the top made sure the masses kept their place through cultural and social condescension.

Limited and restrained government was caricaturized as an antediluvian notion. Many still believe so. But the principles that undergird the Magna Carta and the Federalist Papers ring true to a large swath of individuals across the world. To wit, that the state must always be the servant not the master of the people. It is this simple and cardinal principle of a priori freedom, preceding the establishment of government or religion which has nourished freedom aspiring people since Spartacus uttered the simple words of 'no more.' It is a principle that has been vitiated by the global elite. Look at the price they are paying for that hypertrophied statism.

The air at the top was thin. They breathed only what they wanted and failed to see the gathering storm of populism. The liberal elites failed to see the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea as the first salvo against the established order. The election of Trump in November 2016 and the fall of Aleppo in December were the coup de grace that sealed the deal.

Trump tapped into the suffering and wounded pride of the ignored masses. Eric Hoffer's alluded to this appeal of mass movements in *The True Believer*, a neat counterpoint to Jose Ortega y Gasset's *Revolt of the Masses* which while flipping such appeal on its head confirmed its prognosis. America retains enormous power but evinces no desire to provide law and order services to the world. Russia and China are making portentous military advances with echoes of the naval arms build-up in the 1920s. The Pentagon's Third Offset is ostensibly a military response to that competition. Yet, at its root, it is about military power acclimating to the social and cultural revolution instigated by the proliferation of information.

We now face a more raw and intense scrutiny of international affairs. Problems of nationalities and territories remain enduring headaches for leaders. The instantaneous nature of information exacerbates these difficulties. Modern Belfour Declaration meet contemporary Schleswig-Holstein. Sonderweg is no longer constrained to Germany.

The European dream of a common identity, driven largely by the memories of war, is also eroding. The rise of Lega Nord, the return of "Boulangisme" in France and the emergence of Alternative for Germany (AfD) reek of the nativist nationalism that propelled the world into war. The world was unprepared for that.

We are in virgin territory. We are at a turning point in history akin to the Battle of Vienna of September 12, 1683 where John III Sobieski liberated Vienna from the Ottomans. 318 years later to the day, on September 11, 2001, 19 Islamic terrorist hijackers avenged that loss and altered the course of history. The "end of history" has been firmly discredited. History is here and now.