

Turning a page in Berlin

On Thursday night, September 8, another chapter in history will come to an end with bugles, drum rolls and the furling of the American flag in the heart of Berlin. For a less martial ceremony, you can listen to the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the city's main concert hall, which looks like an overblown Japanese tea-house. But the occasion is the same—to celebrate the departure of the last American, French and British troops from the reunified city that soon will wrest pride of place from Bonn and once more serve as Germany's capital.

Defense Secretary William Perry will be there and so will Chancellor Helmut Kohl, French President François Mitterrand and British Prime Minister John Major. You can hear the speeches already: "deep gratitude . . . bonds of friendship . . . continuity . . . not the end but the beginning."

But make no mistake. The Grand Tattoo in Berlin's Pariser Platz spells a profound break in the history of Europe. For almost 50 years, the U.S. garrison in Berlin marked the farthest eastward projection of American power on the old Continent—as had, in the opposite direction, the Russian contingent that left last week.

The fourfold withdrawal from Berlin marks the true end of World War II. In 1945, the still Allied troops of the Big Four arrived as occupiers to ensure that Germany would never again unleash global war. Then, the Western Three dug in against the new enemy, against the Russia of Stalin and Khrushchev as it tried to expel the West from its lonely outpost in the midst of the Soviet-occupied East Germany.

Where will it end? Fifty years after D-Day, Germany is now free and clear. And you don't have to be Henry Kissinger to start ruminating about history, geography and destiny. For as the U.S. flag is hauled down this week, it is also curtains for the longest-lived international order in the annals of the modern state system. In the East, a great empire has collapsed. In the West, the last superpower is not exactly rushing home, but nobody quite knows where the drawdown of America's Eurotroops will stop.

The postwar order was cast in concrete by vast amounts of countervailing power in the heart of Europe, which kept the two principals and their clients and satraps on their best behavior. While some hundred wars have erupted elsewhere around the world, Europe has remained a solitary island of peace.

Will it remain so in the absence of the Big Two? Bosnia, which incidentally gave us World War I, says "No," as do

the other little wars on the periphery of the defunct Soviet Union. But farther west, the answer remains a firm "Yes."

Indeed, Europe between Portugal and Poland looks more like 1815 than 1918. The end of World War I was merely an intermission before World War II. Yet the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 ushered in almost 40 years of general peace once the Congress of Vienna finished its last waltz.

In 1815, like today, the great powers were exhausted after 22 years of war and they were reasonably happy with the new status quo. So, like today, there were no leftover great-power conflicts to disturb the peace. Crucially, the 1815 order was also buttressed by a consensus on basic values. With the French Revolution routed, the grand ideological

battle was over—just as it was after the demise of communism circa 1990.

In short, it is almost impossible to think of a reason why the Europeans would want to go to war again. To reconquer lebensraum? Hardly. More land just means a bigger agricultural surplus and hence more subsidies and taxes. Why bomb Pearl Harbor if you can simply buy it? If you want to rule the European roost today, deutsche marks are more effective than Big Bertha.

If it is all peaches and cream, why should the United States stay in this blessed place? Easy. Without America, there

won't be a NATO, and without NATO two vital items will go down the drain of history.

First, NATO is the only security institution that still deserves the name. Without its well-oiled machinery—logistics, command structures and all—the U.S. buildup in the Persian Gulf in 1990 would have taken months more, and General Schwarzkopf would have stormed a lot more slowly if his allies had all been following their own national procedures. Also, had it not been for NATO, the Serbs would still be busy with "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia.

Second, the American-led alliance is precisely what stands between those pacific postwar Europeans and the renationalization of their defense. Take away the alliance, and everybody will return to the old ways of ensuring their security. Rather than enhancing trust among Europeans, that would undermine the very edifice of stability that today looks as if it can dispense with its American caretaker.

Back in the White House, President Clinton might want to ponder these points while watching the Stars and Stripes being lowered for the last time. The Berlin Brigade has completed its job in the former Reich capital, but America has not finished its work in Europe. ■



Superpower face-off. The 1948 Allied airlift saved Berlin.

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