

*George Weigel**

Ethics and Public Policy Center

The West's Debt to Lithuania/ Lithuania's Challenge to the West**

The present strategic disarray of the western democracies is both a by-product of the West's failure to grasp the moral-cultural dimension of the end-game of the Cold War and a reflection of the crisis of civilizational morale that has beset western Europe in recent decades. Thus it is important to revisit the distinctive character of the Revolution of 1989/1991 in central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. That dramatic transition in European politics was born from many factors, including the re-arming of the West under the leadership of U.S. President Ronald Reagan. But the political Revolution of 1989/1991 was also the result of a revolution of conscience in central and eastern Europe, in which the reclamation of national identity and culture eventually gave rise to "soft power" tools of resistance that the hard power typically deployed by communist regimes in the face of dissent could not match. Lithuania, which embodied the oft-ignored truth that a tenacious national culture can, over time, produce democratic political change, is thus in a position to remind the West that freedom is never free; that the dignity of the human person, human rights, and the rule of law must be affirmed culturally by a robust civil society if they are to be defended politically and militarily; and that moral relativism is an insecure foundation on which to build, sustain, or defend the institutions of democratic self-governance.

Introduction

As I write in late 2015, the basic security architecture that has guided the West since 1947 – the concepts, the diplomatic and legal arrangements, and the capacities that made victory in the Cold War possible and that once seemed likely to preserve that peace in a pan-European democratic space long into the future – is being dismantled.

It is being dismantled by the Obama administration, whose senior figures never seem to have understood what the Cold War was about, why it had to be fought, or how it was won.

* *George Weigel* is Distinguished Senior Fellow of Washington's Ethics and Public Policy Center, and the author of twenty-three books. In 2014 he was awarded the Lithuanian Diplomatic Star by the foreign ministry of Lithuania. Contact information: 1730 M Street N.W., Suite 910, Washington, D.C. 20036, U.S.A.; phone: 1- 202-682-1200; e-mail: catholicstudies@eppc.org.

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It is being dismantled by western European states that have neither the will nor, given their national priorities, the resources to contribute significantly to maintaining the peace, even on the far borders of NATO.

And it is being dismantled by the revanchist policies of Vladimir Putin's Russia, for whom the effective deconstruction of NATO is a prime imperative and a necessary condition for reversing what President Putin has called the greatest strategic disaster of the twentieth century, namely, the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Unless this pattern of western fecklessness and Russian aggression is reversed, the great hopes for peace, security, and freedom in Europe that were born from the Revolution of 1989 in east central Europe and the implosion of the USSR in 1991 are going to be severely frustrated – and at considerable human cost, as events since Ukraine's Maidan revolution of 2013-14 have demonstrated in blood. What might Lithuania, a frontline NATO state with a distinctive history and Cold War experience, contribute to such a reversal?

It may seem an odd question to pose, given Lithuania's size, exposed position, and limited resources. Yet I think the question is an important one, and not just for Lithuania. Thus the burden of this article will be to suggest that Lithuania has much to contribute to a restoration of strategic wisdom in the West. But the form my proposal will take is more anecdotal than analytic, as befits an author who is not a military strategist but a theologian and papal biographer – albeit a theologian and papal biographer with a longstanding interest in world politics and the Catholic just war tradition of moral reasoning. In any event, I hope these reflections will be of some service in “stretching” the idea of “strategy” as the political and military leadership of the West thinks about the future, and as Lithuania makes its distinctive contribution to that western reflection.

1. Discovering Lithuania

I grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, a city with a small but vibrant Lithuanian-American population, whose communal life was centered on St. Alphonsus Church in the heart of the city. The leading figure in the Lithuanian-American community when I was young was Father Casimir Pugevicius, who served the parish at St. Alphonsus while working on the local Catholic weekly newspaper, the *Catholic Review*. I first met “Father Cas,” as he was universally known, in the 1960s, and while I cannot reconstruct any particular conversation with him, he must have planted in me a seed of interest in Lithuanian affairs, which would flower in unexpected ways in the mid-1980s.

In those days, I was doing some consulting work with a Seattle-based Republican congressman, John Miller, who, like me, had a passionate interest in U.S. human rights policy, which we both believed was one of the keys to resolving the Cold War in favor of the West. With the six hundredth anniversary of Lithuania's conversion to Christianity on the horizon in 1987, I suggested to Congressman Miller in 1985 that he establish a Lithuanian Catholic Religious Freedom Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives, to support the struggles of Lithuania's Catholic Committee for the Defense of Believers' Rights, with whose heroic work I had become familiar over the years since the *Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania* began to circulate in the United States – thanks to the work of Father Casimir Pugevicius, who had been released by the archbishop of Baltimore for full-time work with Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid, a non-governmental organization then headquartered in Brooklyn, New York.

With Congressman Miller's encouragement, I went to Brooklyn to meet Father Cas for the first time in many years, and to inform him of our hopes to get a support-group for religious freedom in Lithuania established in the U.S. House of Representatives. Father Cas was enthusiastic, and introduced me to two of the young people then working for him, Ginte Damusis and Victor Nakas, who would become friends and colleagues in this and other projects in support of Lithuania over the years. Through Pugevicius, I also met Bishop Paulius Baltakis, O.F.M., then serving as bishop for the spiritual assistance of Lithuanians living outside Lithuania.

All that remained was to find a Democratic partner for Congressman Miller in establishing the caucus. A quick study of voter-demographics suggested that a Cleveland-area congressman named Edward Feighan might be naturally sympathetic. So after Mr. Miller had called Congressman Feighan and outlined the plan, I went to meet Feighan's chief-of-staff, a then-obscure young Democratic activist named George Stephanopoulos, who would later become a household name as an aide to President Bill Clinton and a major television personality. George agreed to assign one of his staff to work with me, and the Lithuanian Catholic Religious Freedom Caucus was duly launched.

At the time, three of the principal figures in the Lithuanian Catholic Committee for the Defense of Believers' Rights were in Gulag camps: Sister Nijolė Sadūnaitė, Father Alfonsas Svarinskas, and Father Sigitas Tamkevičius, S.J. So the caucus focused some of its attention to giving visibility to their cases in the Congress and urging the U.S. Department of State and the Reagan administration to keep pressuring the Gorbachev regime in the USSR for their release – a goal that, with the help of many others, we achieved before the

collapse of the USSR. Congressmen Miller and Feighan also sponsored, and I drafted, House Resolution 192, on “the denial of freedom of religion and other human rights in Soviet-occupied Lithuania.” H.Res. 192 was co-sponsored by forty-four Members of the House of Representatives and was passed in time to mark the 600th anniversary of Lithuania’s Christian conversion. On that occasion, the caucus also sponsored a large reception and rally in the U.S. Capitol, at which various Congressmen and Senators spoke in defense of Lithuanian religious freedom and Lithuanian independence, the entire program being broadcast to Lithuania by Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe. At the end of the reception and rally, Bishop Baltakis came up to me and said, with tears in his eyes, “George, everyone in Lithuania will know about this tomorrow.”

The Lithuanian Catholic Religious Freedom Caucus remained active throughout the end-game of the Cold War. In 1988, for example, its members helped distribute and promote *An Appeal for Religious Freedom in the Soviet Union on the Occasion of the Millennium of Christianity in Kievan Rus’*, which I drafted in consultation with scholars specializing in Soviet religious policy. The *Appeal* was signed by virtually every major religious leader in the United States and presented to President Ronald Reagan in the White House, prior to the 1988 Moscow Summit. Themes from the *Appeal* were echoed in the president’s memorable address at Moscow’s Danilov Monastery on May 30, 1988.

In the years that followed, I had the honor of meeting Sister Nijolė, Father Svarinskas, and Father Tamkevičius when they came to Washington. Those “reunions” were replicated over twenty years later, in September 2013, when, in my capacity as John Paul II’s biographer, I made my first visit to Lithuania to help the Lithuanian Bishops Conference mark the twentieth anniversary of Pope the late pope’s epic visit to Lithuania. In a series of speeches and lectures at the Parliament, at the cathedrals in Vilnius and Kaunas, and at Vilnius University, I spoke of John Paul II’s conviction that, just as a revolution of conscience had preceded and made possible the Revolution of 1989 in central and eastern Europe, a similar revolution of conscience had informed Lithuania’s self-liberation from the USSR in 1990 and sustained the Lithuanian people in the face of Soviet attempts to break the Lithuanian independence movement. That visit also gave me a long-anticipated opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the symbolic heart of Lithuania’s revolution of conscience, the Hill of Crosses in Šiauliai, an experience that I later used as the centerpiece for a chapter on the Catholic martyrs of the twentieth century in the revised and expanded edition of my book, *Letters to a Young Catholic*.¹

¹ George Weigel, *Letters to a Young Catholic*, New York: Basic Books, 2015.

2. Why the Cold War Ended the Way It Did

These experiences and the memory of them would be of no particular interest to anyone but me, except for one fact: my work on behalf of Lithuanian religious freedom and Lithuanian independence became an integral part of the analysis of the end-game of the Cold War that I first sketched in *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (the first book, I believe, to make the argument that John Paul II and the Catholic Church had had something to do with the communist crack-up), and in the two volumes of my John Paul II biography: *Witness to Hope* and *The End and the Beginning*.² And that analysis, in turn, helped shape the argument of *The Cube and the Cathedral: Europe, America, and Politics Without God*, in which I first raised the alarm about the spiritual roots of what I termed Europe’s “crisis of civilizational morale.”³ That crisis, I wrote in 2005, was likely to have unfortunate, even dangerous, geopolitical consequences – a suggestion that, unfortunately, has been borne out by the events of recent years.

In brief, what I learned from the experience of Poland, Lithuania, and other self-liberated countries of east central and eastern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s was that the material explanation for the West’s victory in the Cold War was insufficient. And by “material explanation,” I mean those explanations that focused exclusively on the inability of the USSR in the late-Brezhnev and Andropov-Chernenko-Gorbachev eras to complete economically (and thus militarily) in a strategic environment newly dominated by information technology and the other vast changes caused by the micro-chip and fiber-optic revolutions.

Those material explanations are not without merit: I take it as an established fact that the Reagan rearmament program in the United States, and especially the Strategic Defense Initiative, threatened to bankrupt an already ramshackle Soviet economy, which simply could not match American capacities in the relevant fields; realizing that, Mikhail Gorbachev was thus prepared to loosen Moscow’s grip on its Warsaw Pact “allies” (a point he seems to have made to the “allies” as early as 1986) and to contemplate some forms of economic and political liberalization within the Soviet Union itself (a process he

² George Weigel, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, New York: HarperCollins, 1999; George Weigel, *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II – The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy*, New York: Doubleday, 2010.

³ George Weigel, *The Cube and the Cathedral: Europe, America, and Politics Without God*, New York: Basic Books, 2005.

mistakenly thought he could control through the chimera of “reform communism”). All of that is true enough. But as I argued in the above-cited books, that material explanation is an insufficient answer to the question, “Why did the Cold War end *when* it did, and *how* it did?”

The Soviet Union and its imperial hegemony over central and eastern Europe, it now seems clear, was a doomed enterprise, given the Soviet system’s manifest economic incapacities – that is, the Soviet Union and the Soviet empire would, at some point, have collapsed of their own implausibility and inability to compete with the West at some point. But why did this happen in 1989/1991, not 1999/2001, 2009/2011, or even 2019/2021? And why, in the main, did the Cold War and the Soviet Union end without mass violence, which was, unfortunately, the normal method of effecting dramatic social change throughout the bloody twentieth century?

Viewed through the lens of those questions, it seems to me essential to take account of the human rights revolution that began to gather significant momentum in the USSR and in the Warsaw Pact countries in the aftermath of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. Leonid Brezhnev undoubtedly signed the Helsinki Accords on August 1, 1975, in the belief that he was signing a perpetual lease on central and eastern Europe while concurrently securing the Community Party’s “leading role” in a Soviet Union permanently configured as it had been since World War II. In fact, however, the Basket Three human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act (which Brezhnev likely thought as having no more consequence for the USSR and its empire than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) energized human rights activists behind the Iron Curtain. Just as importantly, it gave those activists a new link to the West; there, “Helsinki Monitoring Groups” of various sorts were established and began to pressure their own governments to hold Moscow accountable to its Helsinki commitments. The Lithuanian Catholic Committee for the Defense of Believers’ Rights, and its supporters in the West such as Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid and the Lithuanian Catholic Religious Freedom Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives, were one of many examples of this unexpected dynamic of the “Helsinki process.”

To be sure, none of this was foreseen at Helsinki when the Final Act was signed in the summer of 1975; as no less an authority than Henry Kissinger wrote of the Helsinki Accords and their ultimate impact, “rarely has a diplomatic process so illuminated the limitations of human foresight.”⁴ Nor does lifting up the role of the Helsinki Final Act in the Cold War end-game

⁴ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999, p. 635.

diminish the importance of key leadership in the West. It made a considerable difference that the post-Helsinki West was led by figures like Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Schmidt, and Helmut Kohl, who in their various ways and at various moments in time, came to believe that the Cold War could be won, not simply managed, and that the division of Europe agreed to at the World War II Tehran and Yalta conferences was not a permanent fixture of the international scene.

Yet this gallery of key western leaders (and, more broadly, of leaders of the party of freedom) during the end-game of the Cold War would be incomplete without including Pope John Paul II. Indeed, America's premier historian of the Cold War, Yale's John Lewis Gaddis, who is not a Catholic and is thus free of any charge of special-pleading, stated bluntly in *The Cold War: A New History* that "when John Paul II kissed the ground at the Warsaw airport on June 2, 1979, he began the process by which communism in Poland – and ultimately everywhere – would come to an end."⁵

My only friendly correction to Professor Gaddis would be to change the verb "began" to "ignited." Much had been happening in central and eastern Europe before the nine days of John Paul's epic pilgrimage to his Polish homeland in June 1979. The human rights movements that had been launched by brave "dissidents" throughout the region had been given new energy by the Helsinki Final Act and, as I noted above, a new and politically important lifeline to the West through the various Helsinki Monitoring Groups. The first issue of the *Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania*, manually produced on typewriters and smuggled to readers throughout Lithuania and to the West, had been published on March 19, 1972, and was on its way to becoming the samizdat journal with the longest record of unbroken publishing in the history of the Soviet empire. Charter 77 had been founded in Czechoslovakia, and the beginning of conversations between Catholic "dissidents" and "dissidents" who were non-believers had been organized in Poland. Then, precisely a month after John Paul's first public Mass as pope, with its clarion call to "Be not afraid!"; the Lithuanian Catholic Committee for the Defense of Believers' Rights was established on November 22, 1978 – shortly after John Paul's cardinal's zucchetto had arrived at the *Aušros Vartai* (*Ostrabrama*) shrine in Vilnius, a gift from the new Bishop of Rome and a tribute to a local Church that, like its Polish neighbor, had become the safe-deposit box of national memory and identity against the communist attempt to rewrite Lithuanian history and reconstruct Lithuanian identity. That small red skullcap would also be a permanent reminder that,

⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, New York: Penguin Press, 2005, p. 193.

as John Paul put it in Assisi shortly after his election, the “Church of Silence” would no longer be silenced, because it now had a voice – his.⁶

So there was a lot of tinder on the ground in central and eastern Europe when John Paul II arrived in Poland on June 2, 1979. What he did, that day and the following eight days, was to ignite the tinder and fan it into a bright flame of conscience. Throughout his nine days in Poland, John Paul never spoke once of politics or economics. Rather, in numerous variations on one great theme, he said, if I may paraphrase, “*You are not who they say you are. Permit me to remind you who you really are. Reclaim you authentic culture – your true identity – and you will discover tools of resistance that communism cannot match.*”⁷

And that was as true for Lithuania as it was for Poland: the key to self-liberation lay in national moral and cultural renewal, which typically took the form of what Czech playwright and “dissident” Václav Havel called “living in the truth”: living “as if” one were free, living in quiet but unmistakable defiance of the communist culture of the lie that Havel dissected so brilliantly in his essay, “The Power of the Powerless.”⁸ “Living in the truth” about oneself, one’s culture, and one’s national identity was indeed a weapon of resistance that communism could not match. Why? Because “living in the truth” was a spiritual weapon, and as such, it could not be dulled or blunted by superior material force. And that spiritual weapon would, over time, help those who wielded it find the appropriate political tools to fight a different kind of political struggle for freedom.

Or so John Paul II believed. History would, over the course of the 1980s, vindicate that conviction.

Thus John Paul II’s “grand strategy” in respect of the captive nations of central and eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was, in a phrase, a “culture first” strategy. Culture, he believed, is the driver of history over the long run of history. Politics matters; economics matters; but culture matters most, for culture is the most dynamic force in human affairs and the guarantor of national identity over time. Thus, in the Cold War environment, and in the face of overwhelming material power, expressed in the military assets and secret police forces by which communist regimes maintained control of restive populations, Havel’s “power of the powerless” – John Paul II’s revolution of conscience – was morally, strategically, and tactically appropriate.

⁶ See: George Weigel, *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II – The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy*, Doubleday, 2010, p. 96.

⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 109-16.

⁸ The essay may be found in Václav Havel et al., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1985, p. 23-96.

It was morally appropriate, because it summoned people to resist communism by living in resistance as they wished to live after communism: in the truth about the dignity of the human person, the truth of human rights as inherent and inalienable, and the truth about just governance as based on the consent of the governed. Thus “living in the truth” helped lay the groundwork for successful democratic transitions, having given the “dissidents” who would become leaders in a democratic future an experience of democratic process.

It was strategically appropriate because it struck communism at its most vulnerable point: its claim to a superior morality. That claim, in turn, rested on communism’s claim to have read the human condition and the dynamics of history correctly, which in turn underwrote communism’s claim to historical inevitability. That claim, if accepted, however grudgingly, made resistance futile. “Living in the truth,” in a national revolution of conscience rooted in a reclaimed national culture and identity, helped display the hollowness of communism’s moral and historical claims.

And it was tactically appropriate, because the hard experiences of 1953 in East Germany, 1956 in Hungary, and 1968 in Czechoslovakia had demonstrated that the weapon of “living in the truth” was the only weapon available to those who wanted to resist the communist usurpation of their liberties. Moreover, it was a weapon that, when picked up by different hands, made the forging of new coalitions of resistance possible: coalitions between workers and intellectuals; coalitions made up of city people and rural people; coalitions composed of religious believers and non-believers, who could see in each other men and women of principle.

3. Resisting the Tyranny of the Possible: Lessons Insufficiently Learned

Put another way, the lesson that John Paul II taught with such effect on the political history of central and eastern Europe was that the tools of moral and cultural resistance can be effective in resisting the tyranny of the possible: the auto-constructed tyranny by which we convince ourselves that some things just are the way they are, and nothing can be done about them. Things like the Tehran/Yalta division of Europe into two permanently divided camps. Things like the forced incorporation of Lithuania and the two other Baltic states into the USSR. Things like the Berlin Wall. When we convince ourselves that things cannot change, things don’t change. When we understand that resistance to

the tyranny of the possible is indeed possible, given enough strategic and tactical wisdom about the means of resistance, things can change.

To be sure, things changed in the end-game of the Cold War because the “soft power” tactic of “living in the truth” unfolded within a strategic context of “hard power”: the American-led rearmament of the West, which made the kind of response the Soviet Union had made in East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, and Czechoslovakia in 1968 impossible in 1989. No serious student of this history denies that important dimension of the Cold War end-game. But that was not all there was to the end-game. For if the hard power context favorably shaped the strategic environment so that the “soft power” of “living in the truth” could work, that soft power revolution of conscience, and the strong coalitions of resistance it made possible, were what had been missing in 1953, 1956, and 1968, and in the Polish workers’ risings of 1970 and 1976. The answer to the question of the relationship between “hard power” and “soft power” in the end-game of the Cold War is “both/and,” not “either/or.”

Yet much of the West, in which political science has been reduced to a sub-division of statistics, failed to understand this. And the fact that much of the West failed to grasp the moral-cultural dimension of the Cold War end-game turned out to have strategic consequences. For when Ukraine rose up in the Maidan Revolution of 2013, none of the major powers of NATO or the European Union seemed to recognize on the streets of Kyiv an analogy to what had happened at the Gdańsk shipyard in 1979, or on the streets of Vilnius in 1990: a revolution of conscience that deserved support because it appealed to what the West proclaimed as its own core values – civility, tolerance, human rights, and the democratic rule of law, all rooted in convictions about the dignity of the human person that could be known from both reason and revelation. Failing to recognize that analogy, the West, in the main, did nothing to reverse the illegal Russian annexation of Crimea, and did little in response to the Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine, which has rendered a considerable part of that country ungovernable while putting Ukraine’s entire national awakening and democratic breakthrough in jeopardy.

Lithuania was an exception to this western blindness, in part because it seemed that it might be next on Vladimir Putin’s menu, and in part because some of Lithuania’s political class still understood that the country’s self-liberation in 1990-91 had had a profound moral-cultural dimension. Thus former Head of State Vytautas Landsbergis, pondering the future of Europe, asked his countrymen to remember the night when the power of the powerless, expressing itself through a renewed sense of national identity and culture, faced down brute, material force:

We have to recall the night of the thirteenth of January, 1991...when two worlds confronted each other in our capital city of Vilnius. One of them comprised the tens of thousands of Lithuanian citizens who had gathered that late evening. They had not known one another beforehand, but they stood together, united by love, but facing another world. That other world was made up of armed men, foreign soldiers, standing sullen in serried rows, looking down in cold hatred, their eyes filled with contempt...

Only oaths and swear words came from these aggressors, but the thousands defending the TV tower had prayers in their hearts as their lips united in one simple word which expressed love for our homeland and the desire for freedom: *Lie-tu-va! Lie-tu-va!* Yes, *Lie-tu-va, Lie-tu-va!* Of course, they were naming Lithuania not in the sense of geography, but because its naming announced their rejection of the violence they faced and the slavery which it stood for...

We Lithuanians survived that January 13th night because brotherly love – love of freedom and love for our homeland – won its victory against the tanks. Such things do not happen often. Let us be aware of this testimony, and remember.⁹

Landsbergis concludes his essay on the future of Europe with the hope that the European Union would build its future on a firm moral-cultural foundation, warning that a “promising living standard” must be found, “not in the global shops, but in our hearts.”¹⁰ Yet is it not precisely that sense of democratic solidarity – indeed, human solidarity – that has been missing from so much of the EU’s response, and NATO’s response, to Russian aggression in Ukraine? Has the West forgotten the moral and strategic lesson engraved on the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington: “Freedom Is Never Free”? The first two years of the West’s response to Russian aggression in Ukraine and elsewhere suggest that those questions are not misplaced.

4. Lithuania’s Challenge to the West

Lithuania and the other post-Cold War members of the European Union may have entered the EU imagining that the moral-cultural foundations for European unity, as conceived by such European founding fathers as Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi, and Konrad Adenauer, were still reasonably intact. These Christian Democratic statesmen – a Frenchman born in Luxembourg, an Italian born in the Tyrol when it was part of Austria-Hungary, and a German from the Rhineland – understood that the horror of Europe’s mid-twentieth century would only intensify unless something were done to re-knit the unity of Europe that began to fracture with the breakdown of the Carolingian empire, and that splintered even more dramatically with the Reformation

⁹ Vytautas Landsbergis, *Crossroad of Europe*, Vilnius: EPP-ED, 2008, p. 180-81.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

and the rise of the modern nation-state system. Schuman, de Gasperi, and Adenauer were realists enough to recognize that “Christendom” could not be reconstituted. But they imagined that something resembling that continental-wide civilization could find political form if the work of reconstruction began by eliminating competition for basic resources (hence the European Coal and Steel Community) and then enlarging that enterprise into a unified economic space (the European Common Market). Functional, economic integration, these founders of the post-war European project believed, could smooth out the rough edges of nationalism; moreover, they thought, Europe’s ancient cultural resources, including biblical religion and that confidence in the powers of human reason that first took philosophical form in classical Athens, could help build a new sense of pan-European solidarity, which would eventually find its own political expression – which is today’s European Union.

The problem, it now seems clear, is that the bet the founding fathers of today’s Europe made on the state of Europe’s cultural foundations was misplaced. For as economic integration was being complemented by political integration in an enlarged EU “space,” European high culture was being beset by various demons: a skepticism about the human capacity to know anything with certainty, including moral truths; a nihilism that found its most dramatic expression in history’s first self-induced demographic winter, as total fertility rates throughout the EU plummeted below replacement level and remained there; a moral relativism that led to state-enforced political correctness inside Europe (thus eroding such basic human rights as freedom of speech and religion), and that left Europe defenseless against other civilizational enterprises with very different ideas of the human future, including Putin’s Russia and jihadist Islam. This cultural crisis found political expression during the debate over the new EU constitutional treaty, during which two of the continent’s most prominent intellectuals, Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, argued in a widely-circulated article that the new, expanded EU must be “neutral between worldviews” – as if any stable, democratic political community could be constructed on the basis of such principled relativism.¹¹

The political signs of this European crisis of civilizational morale, and the concomitant European unwillingness to maintain minimum standards of order in Europe’s own neighborhood, were first evident in the crisis caused by the post-Cold War break-up of Yugoslavia: an entirely foreseeable dissolution that Europe ought to have managed, but which, absent European leadership,

¹¹ Cited in Gerald Owen, “Habermas + Derrida: Modernism a Beneficiary of War in Iraq,” *National Post*, August 2, 2003.

quickly spiraled downward into a humanitarian crisis into which Europe only managed to restore a measure of order (which considerable American military assistance) when genocide was well underway.

The signs became more ominous when France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Great Britain, and other EU members states failed to deal with the challenge of jihadist Islam within their own national borders, allowing sharia law to prevail in Muslim-dominated neighborhoods in open defiance of established local laws banning forced marriage, honor killings, female genital mutilation, and so forth.

Then came Ukraine. And while Europe did manage to impose economic sanctions on Putin's Russia for its aggression, it seemed prepared to go no farther than that, even as the fundamental international legal norm of the inviolability of borders was brazenly violated by Russian actions in Crimea and the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Russian actions to foment internal discord in the Baltic States got precious little attention in the West, thus raising the specter that a Russian aggression in Lithuania, Latvia, or Estonia would not trigger the NATO response mandated by Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty – an abrogation of responsibility that would, *de facto*, put an end to history's most successful defensive alliance.

It is certainly true that the historical ignorance and strategic blindness of the United States under the Obama administration has gravely exacerbated the threat to the European security order posed by Putin's Russia – as indeed that same ignorance and blindness has seized defeat from the jaws of victory in the Middle East while replacing a modicum of order with lethal chaos. But the Obama administration's course might have been tempered had the EU and the European members of NATO taken the leadership that is properly theirs in dealing with the Ukraine crisis. Be that as it may, the question remains, why is Europe so feckless in the face of the gravest threats to its security since the darkest days of the Cold War?

I suggest that Europe is strategically blind and politically feckless in the face of Islamist terrorism and Russian aggression because of its crisis of civilizational morale. That crisis has now reached such a state of gravity that Europe cannot even bring itself to defend the superiority of the democratic way of life against the new authoritarianism of Russia and the jihadist totalitarianism of radical Islam. Europe is largely defenseless politically and militarily because it does not want to defend itself morally and culturally; instead, too much of Europe wants to be left alone with its pleasures.

Europe has become, in a word, decadent. And cultural decadence ine-

vitably leads to political decadence, as the history of the West from the late Roman Empire to the Weimar Republic illustrates. If Europe is to find a different path to the future than those historical entities took, Europe needs deep, moral and cultural renewal, based on a nobler understanding of freedom than self-indulgence.

And that, at the end of a long journey of reminiscence and analysis, leads to a final question: What might Lithuania do about that?

As a frontline NATO member-state, Lithuania certainly ought to press for a major expansion of NATO facilities and personnel (including heavy-armed U.S. brigades) in the Baltic states and Poland, and a rapid development of western broadcasting and social-media capabilities to counter the barrage of Russian propaganda that has accompanied Putin's aggression in the past and will likely accompany it in the future. Lithuania might also urge a reconsideration of the Obama administration's ill-advised decisions on ballistic missile defense emplacements in Poland and the Czech Republic. Beyond this Lithuania and other frontline NATO member-states should urge the alliance to recommit itself publicly, and in an unambiguous way, to Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty, thus making clear to President Putin the meaning of aggression against a NATO member-state.

But there is more. Lithuania would also serve the cause of the future of freedom in the West if it reminded its North Atlantic partners of the truth of its own recent historical experience. That experience has taught – or certainly should have taught – Lithuania that, while “grand strategy” involves reflection on how the various instruments of national power can be deployed in a coordinated way to achieve the goals of peace, security, and freedom, those “instruments of power” include the moral and cultural power of the West's distinctive civilizational identity. That identity, in turn, is not merely geographical, ethnic, or linguistic. It is built out from a vibrant public moral culture that teaches new generations respect for the inalienable dignity and value of every human person; responsibility for the common good, not just private or individual goods; self-command; and a sense of solidarity that reaches across religious, familial, and class lines to build genuine political community.

Much of Europe has forgotten much of that; too much of America is in the process of forgetting it. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lithuanians may well have thought, and with reason, that the West owed Lithuania a great debt of gratitude for helping bring down history's worst tyranny. Now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the challenge before Lithuania may be even greater. For those who care about the future of

the West and the future of freedom – a future that looked so promising with the collapse of the Soviet order – must now look to the new democracies of central and eastern Europe to remind all of us that freedom is never free, and that freedom understood as mere license is always freedom's own undoing.

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