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## The End of the War on Terror

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By Michael Cecire : [BIO](#) | 12 Sep 2008

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When I woke up on the morning of September 12, 2001, I remember crawling out of bed sleepily and beginning my customary morning routine. The first splashes of sunlight fell in through the window as I pulled on my clothes; then nausea hit me. And panic. And memory.



The attacks from the day before were so utterly horrible, so grotesquely magnificent that it took all my strength to keep from keeling over from the sharp aches of disbelief, realizing that thousands of my countrymen had been butchered by hate-drunk fanatics. The maxim that 9/11 'changed everything,' has been whispered, parroted, and even mocked, but I remember very clearly feeling the maelstrom of events move the ground beneath me. Everything had changed, indeed.

What did we learn from 9/11? Presumably, it was that the economic, political, and social progress of liberal democracy was experiencing its most grievous resistance since the Soviet Union's fall. Dreams of freedom's inevitable, confident march fell charred and battered among the smoldering ruins of the Twin Towers, and it became clear that our universal paradise was in fact further away than we had ever imagined. So we responded; we fought back.

With ferocity and tactical brilliance, American and Allied forces crushed the ugly Taliban regime and began reconstruction. Then we invaded Iraq, as if to say: *Let it be known that the United States of America will meet opposition to freedom's march head-on.* Forget oil, forget terrorism, forget all that stuff - Iraq was always meant to demonstrate a commitment to our massive project of global freedom, of Pax Americana, to show that we would not be deterred even in the face of even the most shocking adversity.

And for all our defeats, misgivings, debates, and crises, America found its proconsul in the aptly-named David Petraeus. Iraq is on its way to pacification; Afghanistan is dangerous but holding. And the revolutions! Georgia's Rose Revolution, Ukraine's Orange Revolution, Lebanon's Cedar Revolution, Kyrgystan's Tulip Revolution - tyrants torn down by brave democrats asking only for the most basic freedoms that we Americans take for granted. Freedom had a chance once more.

And we thought maybe, just maybe, we could weather this little economic downturn and get back to the business of advancing universal liberal democracy. Sure we have problems - Russia, China, Iran, perennial terrorist things here and there - but we could feel confident again. The news networks were now more interested in kidnapped white girls and celebrity dress-sizes - strong reminders of more bullish days in the 1990s. Even "The X-Files" made a temporary return; oh, how we miss the 90s.

I remember waking up on August 8, 2008. I fell out of my hard futon, blinking sleepily as I staggered to the shower, my real bed unused in a corner, gathering clothes and books; then nausea hit me. And panic. And memory.

My wonderful friends, people with whom I'd lived as a Peace Corps Volunteer, were suffering incomprehensibly in Georgia. Terrorized by the brutal premeditation of revanchist Russia's full might, my freedom-loving Georgian friends faced the horrors of war and invasion by their persistently unfriendly neighbor to the north, which sought to make their country into an example. *How dare we be denied our empire*, sang the shrill cries of Russian bombs and wheezing tanks. Our Georgian ally, however brave and resolute, had no capacity to deny the overwhelming might of Russia's military and its resolve to humiliate and crush that tiny, fiercely proud county that had for so long defied Moscow.

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Georgia was once known as the 'Soviet Riviera' for its breathtaking coastline, its majestic mountain ranges, and its Mediterranean clime. Playground of the Soviet elite, the country's stature was further bolstered by its centuries-old winemaking tradition, colorful cultural dances, and rich history - it's a country that is palpably ancient, from the ruins of castles nestled in the hills to the mystical tonality of Georgian liturgical music. Such a prize, that Georgia, and the Soviets heaped favor upon it. And yet, in 1991, the Georgians too wanted their independence. *Those ungrateful Georgians*, must have murmured the Russian brass, *the cream of the USSR has turned their back on Us, their benevolent patrons*. And then the real shock came in 2003, when a passionate, Columbia-educated lawyer took a stand; he wanted his country to chart its own way, and worse, he wanted that way to lean West. Georgia's Rose Revolution shook the world in a manner unparalleled in our time, when the Georgians - those hardy mountain folk - decided that enough was enough, it was time not just for independence, but to *be* independent. They chose democracy, human rights, civil freedoms, and Russia bristled at their impudence, their arrogance.

Somehow, we Americans believed that because leadership of the world had fallen to us that it was meant to be so. It's not uncharacteristic, as Robert Kagan tells us<sup>1</sup>, for America was founded and thrived upon a belief that the big picture - the rights enshrined in our constitution - was political scripture and that the world had a right to such freedoms. It was our duty to see it through. And though our friends in Georgia, in Ukraine, and even in Lebanon and Iraq heard the call and saw the shifting waters, America became deluded into believing that the old guard - the autocrats, the tyrants, their cronies - would take it sitting down. Worse, we thought that our narrative of freedom was somehow stronger than competing ideologies of theocracy and national greatness.

I imagine posterity will look back on this moment as the dusk of American unipolarity. Make no mistake, the United States remains uniquely formidable militarily, culturally, and politically, but the force of the once unbeatable ideology of liberal democracy's unassailable march lies twisted and crushed in the battlefields of the Caucasus. Nation states have joined the rebellion, and done so with a fearsome vengeance. As China coolly flexes its muscles in an extravagant, tightly regulated Olympic Games, so too does Russia as its armies pour into the borders of its enemies. And worse, the American response to Russian aggression has been beyond tepid, and the world is duly taking note.

It's not so much that the Global War on Terror has ended as much as it never really was. The War on Terror, for all its lofty goals and essential prosecution, will probably be remembered as but the prelude to the new age in which we've officially entered.

So perhaps American hyperpower has ended, but that does not mean America can be counted out. It just means we have to take ourselves seriously once again.

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<sup>1</sup> Neocon Nation: c. 1776

<http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/2008%20-%20Spring/full-neocon.html>

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