



# From Berlin to Baghdad: America's Search for Purpose in the Post-cold War World

*Hal Brands*

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On November 9, 1989, a mob of jubilant Berliners dismantled the wall that had divided their city for nearly forty years; this act of destruction anticipated the momentous demolition of the European communist system. Within two years, the nations of the former Eastern Bloc toppled their authoritarian regimes, and the Soviet Union ceased to exist, fading quietly into the shadows of twentieth century history and memory. By the end of 1991, the United States and other Western nations celebrated the demise of their most feared enemy and reveled in the ideological vindication of capitalism and liberal democracy.

As author Hal Brands compellingly demonstrates, however, many American diplomats and politicians viewed the fall of the Soviet empire as a mixed blessing. For more than four decades, containment of communism provided the overriding goal of American foreign policy, allowing generations of political leaders to build domestic consensus on this steady, reliable foundation. *From Berlin to Baghdad* incisively dissects the numerous unsuccessful attempts to devise a new grand foreign policy strategy that could match the moral clarity and political efficacy of containment. Brands takes a fresh look at the key events and players in recent American history.

In the 1990s, George H. W. Bush envisioned the United States as the guardian of a "new world order," and the Clinton administration sought the "enlargement" of America's political and economic influence. However, both presidents eventually came to accept, albeit grudgingly, that America's multifaceted roles, responsibilities, and objectives could not be reduced to a single fundamental principle. During the early years of the George W. Bush administration, it appeared that the tragedies of 9/11 and the subsequent "war on terror" would provide the organizing principle lacking in U.S. foreign policy since the containment of communism became an outdated notion. For a time, most Americans were united in support of Bush's foreign policies and the military incursions into Afghanistan and Iraq.

As the swift invasions became grinding occupations, however, popular support for Bush's policies waned, and the rubric of the war on terror lost much of its political and rhetorical cachet. *From Berlin to Baghdad* charts the often onerous course of recent American foreign policy, from the triumph of the fall of the Berlin Wall to the tragedies of 9/11 and beyond, analyzing the nation's search for purpose in the face of the daunting complexities of the post-Cold War world.

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