

Remarks
by
Robert M. Gates
Director of Central Intelligence
at the
Berlin Wall Monument Dedication

CIA Headquarters
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Selected Speeches Given by
Robert M. Gates
Director of Central Intelligence
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	<u>Page</u>
Swearing-in Ceremony CIA Headquarters	November 12, 1991 1
“But as we look at this monument, it reminds us that our work is not over. There are other walls to tear down—the wall built by tyrants who would deny others their freedom, the wall that imprisons those addicted to illegal drugs, the wall of fear created by the terrorists and the wall of defiance, built by those who seek weapons of mass destruction.”	3
World War II Dedication CIA Headquarters	December 4, 1991 17
Homecoming Ceremony for William F. Buckley and William R. Higgins Andrews AFB, Maryland	<i>Dedication of the Berlin Wall Monument</i> <i>CIA Headquarters</i> December 30, 1991 December 18, 1992 <i>Robert M. Gates</i> 23
Order of the Arrow Wichita, Kansas	January 4, 1992 27
Unveiling of Judge William Webster's Portrait CIA Headquarters	January 14, 1992 35
Martin Luther King Program CIA Headquarters	January 23, 1992 39
Oklahoma Press Association Tulsa, Oklahoma	February 21, 1992 43
Black History Month CIA Headquarters	February 27, 1992 53
Nixon Library Conference Washington, D. C.	March 12, 1992 57

I want to welcome all of you this afternoon to this ceremony dedicating our Berlin Wall Monument. I also invite you to visit the exhibit of photographs on Berlin, located in the atrium of our new headquarters building, after the ceremony.

Over 30 years ago—in August 1961—the first strands of barbed wire and the first barricades were positioned along the Soviet Sector in the city of Berlin. Buildings next to the East side of the border were evacuated—their windows and doorways, bricked-up. Guard dogs and watch towers appeared. A strip of territory was cleared and became a “no-man’s land”—with land mines and more barbed wire. And a wall of concrete—six feet high—was quickly erected along the 27 mile border.

All of these measures were taken by the communists, not to prepare for an enemy attack from the West, but to prevent the mass migration of East German citizens to freedom, to the West.

No other symbol so clearly represented the battle line drawn between East and West, between democracy and communism, between freedom and totalitarianism, than the Berlin Wall.

The Wall was an ugly scar across the face of Berlin. And for nearly three decades, it stood as a silent, but constant reminder of the failure of communism—its total rejection of freedom, its blatant disregard for the individual. The Wall was erected as a desperate act—those who could not be swayed by theory, would be held by force.

But the true dimensions of the Wall cannot be measured by its height or by its length, but its toll on the citizens of Berlin. For over 28 long years they faced the Wall—day in and day out—separated from family and friends—husbands from wives, brothers from sisters, citizens from their fellow countrymen. All Berliners knew the pain of separation and all wanted desperately to be reunited in peace and freedom.

Over the years, their hope, their will, and their determination never wavered—nor did America’s resolve in facing the challenge posed by the Berlin Wall.

Of all the leaders who traveled to Berlin, perhaps President Kennedy best expressed the hopes of the West, when he said:

"You live in a defended island of freedom, but your life is part of the main. . . . Lift up your eyes beyond the dangers of today, to the hopes of tomorrow, beyond the freedom merely of this city of Berlin, or your country of Germany, to the advance of freedom everywhere, beyond the wall to the day of peace with justice, beyond yourselves and ourselves to all mankind."

Twenty-five years later the political climate had been transformed and another American President traveled to the city of Berlin. President Reagan realized that dramatic change was possible, and in an impassioned speech at the foot of the Brandenburg Gate, he demanded of Soviet President Gorbachev, "Tear down this wall!"

But ultimately, it wasn't the Soviet government who leveled the Wall, it was the citizens of Berlin themselves—ordinary people, taking into their own hands, hammers and chisels—battering the wall—each reclaiming the unity and freedom for their country that had been denied for so long.

Today, we are fortunate—with the assistance of General Haddock, Ambassador Walters, our Fine Arts Commission, and the Directorates of Operations and Administration—to have a portion of the Berlin Wall here at our headquarters building. This monument that we dedicate today stands for many things, but most of all it is a permanent reminder of the power of a single and truly revolutionary idea—freedom.

Our Fine Arts Commission took great pains to find the right location for this monument. Its north-south orientation mirrors the Wall's placement along Potsdammer Platz in Berlin. The West side of the Wall is covered with original graffiti that reflects the color, hope and optimism of the West itself. It stands in stark contrast to the East side of this wall, which is white-washed and devoid of color and life. The monument is also placed in the middle of a main thoroughfare leading to our building—and so it must be confronted by our people daily, just as it was for nearly three decades by the citizens of Berlin.

But for all of us here today, these three slabs of concrete and steel hold a special meaning. Just as the Berlin Wall was being erected, we were moving into the headquarters building that stands behind us. And over the next 28 years, much of the work that took place here was devoted to breaking down the barriers to freedom created by the Cold War. In Berlin itself, we worked to bring down those barriers, and the names of those who worked there, took risks there, fought for freedom there include some of the most familiar names of CIA's history, people such as Dick Helms, Bill Harvey, Bill Graver and Dave Murphy.

America's intelligence services were well suited to meet the demands of a Cold War, where military force was too harsh, and polite diplomacy, too mild. We helped our leaders to navigate through these uncharted waters; we told them of the prospects for war and the potential for peace.

During those Cold War years, our view had to be global in scope. And through our actions, we countered the communist threat worldwide—not only in Germany, but in Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Angola, Afghanistan—anywhere across the globe where free people were faced with the tyranny of communism.

I do not intend to let this opportunity pass without insisting with pride that American Intelligence played a critical role in preventing World War III and in the triumph of the West over communism.

In the 40 years of the Cold War, as the two superpowers sat with their fingers on the nuclear trigger, there was no nuclear war or global conflagration in large part because US Intelligence accurately told American leaders—and indeed the world at large—what was happening militarily on the other side. We watched their planes, their ships, their missiles, their armies, we knew where they were, their state of alert, and what they were doing. This played a critical role in preventing a mistake or miscalculation that could have incinerated the world. By the same token, US Intelligence provided nearly all of the information that made arms control agreements and associated lessening of tensions possible, from the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 to START II this year.

During the long decades of the Cold War, one of the reasons that “containment” worked was that while military forces trained and exercised and glowered at one another, US Intelligence was in the trenches and at war—from Italy and France out of World War II to Berlin in the 1960s to Afghanistan in the 1980s. Containment worked not just because the Soviet system was fundamentally flawed, but also because Soviet aggression and subversion were resisted—and that resistance was usually organized or supported by American Intelligence.

Though the Cold War is over, and the threat from communism has all but evaporated, American Intelligence still has—and must maintain—a global view. In earlier years, we were concerned that underdeveloped and unstable countries would be susceptible to Communist influence. Today, many of these same countries are still unstable, threatened by fanatics, or facing humanitarian crises that not only endanger their sovereignty, but also challenges regional stability.

So in many ways, this monument represents a tremendous success—and a tremendous challenge.

We must remember that those who conceived America's policies to contain Soviet Communism, and those from CIA who helped implement them, had the conviction, the faith that Communism was doomed, that freedom and democracy would triumph. In his farewell address on January 15, 1953, President Truman said:

"As the free world grows stronger, more united, more attractive to men on both sides of the Iron Curtain—and as the Soviet hopes for easy expansion are blocked—then there will have to come a time of change in the Soviet world. Nobody can say for sure when that is going to be, or exactly how it will come about, whether by revolution, or trouble in the satellites, or by a change inside the Kremlin. Whether the communist rulers shift their policies of their own free will—or whether change comes about in some other way—I have not a doubt in the world that a change will occur. I have a deep and abiding faith in the destiny of free men. With patience and courage, we shall someday move on into a new era."

Thirty-six years later the Wall came down and we are moving on into the new era President Truman believed would come.

Our work is not over. There are other walls to tear down—the wall built by tyrants who would deny others their freedom, the wall that imprisons those addicted to illegal drugs, the wall of fear created by the terrorist and the wall of defiance, built by those who seek weapons of mass destruction.

These are the walls that the democracies now seek to tear down. And with strong intelligence, and effective cooperation at home and abroad, these walls too will come down.