

A quarter of a century ago – has it been so long? – the world order that we'd known for 50 years, the status quo of the preceding near half century was shifting and about to collapse. The world, at least from our perspective then, was bi-polar, consisting of liberal democracy with market economies, found mainly in the West, versus illiberal autocracy combined with collective ownership, also known as Communism, mainly in the East. Of course, to keep things in perspective, most of the world was too poor to be considered part of either, whence the now rarely used term "Third World". This neat or at least simplistic order was beginning to crumble and soon would collapse. The first semi-democratic election in the communist world – in Poland 25 years ago – was a milestone in what we thought was, and for the time felt to be, an irreversible march to liberty.

Indeed we should recognise how miraculous that election was. With the deck stacked for the communists, with censorship still in place, Solidarity won 99 out of 100 seats in the Senate, showing what the Polish people thought of communism.

Also in that year, another milestone I would argue, an American, then at the State Department's Policy planning staff, Francis Fukuyama, published what must be considered one of the seminal essays of the late twentieth century, "The End of History", later expanded into a book of the same name, arguing that the ideological debate between liberal democracy and authoritarian communism was over, and liberal democracy had won.

Fukuyama, it is important to note, did not say liberal democracy had won in the real world or that everyone had embraced democracy – a criticism often leveled at him and I think that's a strawman criticism, but rather that the contest for ideas was over, that no one could any longer make claims for the superiority of an authoritarian regime.

At that time, the Soviet Union had yet to collapse, its days were numbered and when it did, we took it as more proof of Fukuyama's Hegelian view of history and the victory of liberal democracy.

Today, 80% of Russians support annexation through military aggression in Crimea, where the Anschluss

of territory is justified by the presence of co-ethnics. Moreover, there is widespread support for anti-liberal attack against "permissiveness", be it in freedom of speech or choice of life-partners. Indeed, we see that liberal democracy has not only failed in the battle of ideas against authoritarianism, but it has failed even to prevent the resurrection of that once vanquished demon, fascism. Moreover, it is resurgent not only in Russia, where a generation has grown up since the end of communist rule, but even in what we thought bastions of liberal democracy, in Western Europe, which should know well the demons of fascism and the ideologies of hatred, these same ideas are gaining new currency. Not in Ukraine though, where the two neo-fascist candidates on 25 May received about 1 percent each, as opposed to the results we saw in many countries in the European Parliamentary elections the same day.

What went wrong? Why is it that today everything seems more insecure than even in the Cold War, when at least we had agreed upon rules of international behaviour regarding what countries may or may not do.

The main answer is that the rules no longer apply. What was agreed to and generally followed even at the height of the Cold War today lies shattered.

Part of the answer lies in another essay that later became a best-selling book too, Samuel Huntington's "The Clash of Civilisations", that appeared four years after Fukuyama's essay. Huntington saw future conflicts in the post-ideological age to be ones between cultures and civilisations, that seemed to be verified by the 9/11 attacks, motivated as they were by a religion-based antipathy toward modernity.

And soon enough, we were challenged on our own ground, in empirical reality not political science theory. In New York, in Washington, in mass attacks in Madrid, London and Bombay. All challenged the liberal order, attacking inter alia democratic elections, the equality of men and women, the separation of church and state, the rule of laws, not men or God.

Until recently it seemed that this was a revolt against modernity, against the disruptions of globalised capitalism. We thought, though, that on our own continent the wars of the 20th Century, the defeat of Nazism and the collapse of communism had settled, as Fukuyama maintained, once and for all the primacy and Hegelian ineluctability of the triumph of liberal democracy. Indeed we thought then, and some former Chancellors still do, that democracy in Russia reigned supreme.

As we have seen, it hadn't. Ideas such as territorial annexation, based on co-ethnics abroad, which we saw last in 1938 with the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and the Anschluss of Sudetenland and Austria – ideas we believed were settled for good on May 8, 1945, had not been.

But that was the oldest rule now null and void. There is the prohibition of aggression that came into effect with the UN Charter, also from 1945, stating that Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.

The next foundation of security to fall were the Helsinki Accords from 1975, in which the trans-Atlantic countries – from Vancouver to Vladivostok – agreed not to use force to change borders or challenge the independence of any state; "to regard one another's frontiers inviolable and to refrain from making each other's territory the object of military occupation". No such occupation or acquisition, according to the Accords, would be recognized as legal.

Then there's the 1990 CSCE Charter of Paris for a new Europe in which the signatories of all the then members, including newly free Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary as well as Russia's legal predecessor, the USSR, agreed to "fully recognize the freedom of States to choose their own security arrangements". I quote that to recall the argument made to justify the attacks against both Georgia in 2008 and now against Ukraine.

All this was done in the liberal spirit of Immanuel Kant's Perpetual Peace (1795). Aside from the internal market, the intellectual foundations of the European Union as well of NATO ultimately rest on Immanuel Kant's essay. Kant believed in what has two centuries later become our dominant foreign policy mantra: republics – that is today, democratic states based on the rule of law – who form a federation, do not wage war on each other. The European Union has, since its origins in the Coal and Steel Community in 1951, amply proved Kant's thinking to be correct. Where we went wrong, though, was that we believed the agreements of 1945 to the present, the ones I just enumerated, also constituted a Kantian federation. They did not. And the communities of liberal democracies had not solved what to do with countries outside a federation of democracies.

By and large, we have extrapolated from Kant and the experiences of the EU to come to believe that, tied to a latticework of agreements, countries will not engage in aggression, forgetting that in the case of the the UN, the CSCE, OSCE, and numerous other lesser treaties, that Kant was right but offered no solutions on how to get along with despotisms and tyrannies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thus, today, we find ourselves in a completely new Security Environment. It's not a "New Cold War", because the Cold War had all those agreements. We're back in a Hobbesian state of nature. And on top of that we are abandoning the principle for the prospect of enrichment.

In this radically new situation, the liberal democratic West is still looking for answers – or failing to agree on what those might be. We still do not know how to react. What we must realize, however, is that once the rules, the Helsinki accords and others, no longer hold in relation with one signatory, the situation has changed for all of us.

This is not a East European issue. Ukraine is not a "faraway country we know nothing about" – to quote British Foreign Secretary Neville Chamberlain when he agreed to allow Adolf Hitler dismember Czechoslovakia in Munich in 1938.

As I said, I speak of these conundra because the liberal order is being challenged by authoritarian, illiberal, yet often successful market economies in ways we did not foresee when the first free elections were held in Poland 25 years ago.

I would argue that if we are to look for an analagous era, we can rather find it in a pre-Cold War period, in say 1946 or 1947, feeling around to figure out what we should do. We feel instinctively, as we did then, or as the previous generation did, we are in a new era, we want desperately to believe in the old coalitions, and hang on to them in the hope that all this will go away. That Crimea will be restored, that we don't have to go on with sanctions or raise defense expenditures. That we can go on making money with our deals and our financial institutions and our lucrative trade in everything from gas to building Spetsnaz training centers in Russssia. Like the plaintive teen-ager who asks Why can't we all just get along?

I can't resist here and not quote Lenin, who immortally said, "the Capitalists will sell us the rope with which we will hang them".

Not being stupid, we know that things are going awry, but maybe we can still make one more deal, build one more pipeline, sell one more bit of military hardware before we have to stop.

And maybe the European election results are a one-off and the right-wing populists, the Jobbiks, the National Fronts and others will become reasonable when they take office.

And maybe we can convince Russia that homophobia, censorship and repressions at home, and little green men, and taking OSCE observers hostage, and accusing the Ukrainians of fascism was all a big mistake. That we wake up from a bad dream and restore the status quo ante at the end of history.

But ladies and gentlemen, Peace, Love and Woodstock is over. We've just had our Altamont. And if you got that last sentence, you're about to enter, if not already have entered, retirement.

So I end on this melancholy note – but this was to be a scenesetter – and hope that with the judicious guidance of a vibrant, fiercely democratic Poland, the only large European country with a living memory of what authoritarian rule, communist rule, is about, we come together and together find a way out of this Hobbesian world we find ourselves in today, Anno Domini 2014.