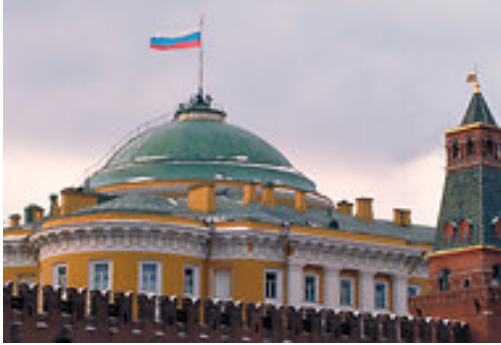


When Regime Change Came With a Whimper

By SERGE SCHMEMANN



As they watched, she said, the red flag with the hammer-and-sickle of the Soviet Union was lowered over the Kremlin, and in its stead, after an absence of 74 years, rose the white, blue and red flag of Russia. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was no more.

It was indisputably a defining moment in the 20th century, the end of a utopian experiment of mind-boggling ambition that, in the name of creating a perfect society, ended up butchering 10 million people and repressing the rest, along with half of Europe.

Today there is a lot of soul-searching in the United States and Europe about why our democratic governments “supported” this or that fallen, or still active, dictator. It is a false argument, because it presumes that outside forces are somehow responsible for keeping a tyrant in power or removing him. Ultimately it is only the ruled who can know when they have had enough, and when they are ready to risk their lives and security to throw off a tyranny. The Declaration of Independence, in setting out its great justification for rebellion, also warned against doing so lightly: “Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/25/opinion/sunday/when-the-soviet-regime-fell-with-a-whimper.html>