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There have been many major international, political events in my lifetime. I was born in 1990, and the world is a very different place today than it was 21 years ago. The World Wide Web was a relatively new invention that very few people understood and even fewer actually used it. Today, the Internet is omnipresent, and nearly everyone has access to it. But there are two events in my lifetime that have that stand out to have influenced me on a personal level.

The first of these events was the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, but more specifically the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. My parents moved to Germany in the fall of 1986 from Michigan. My father worked as an engineer, and a job transfer brought him to Germany. They lived in a quiet suburb of the sprawling metropolis of Cologne. In 1989, the political environment across Europe was starting to change. The once all-powerful USSR was starting to show signs of decay, and Germany was divided into East and West Germany. With the decline of the USSR, my father was nervous as to the political instability that a power vacuum would create. Then in November 1989, a dramatic turn of events occurred. The citizens of Berlin tore down the wall that separated the city. Several of my parent’s friends in Germany actually participated in the demonstrations against the USSR. This action spat in the face of the authoritarian rule of the Soviets. Then in December of 1989, my mother found out that she was pregnant with me. This information combined with the political turmoil that my father feared convinced my parents to relocate back to Michigan. I was born in June 1990. Then as it became apparent that the Soviet Union was going to collapse in mid-1991, my father decided to resume working in Germany. We moved to Germany in October 1991 and continued to live there until 1996. The overthrow of the oppressive Communist government by popular demand is very inspirational to me and to my family. To this day we have a 3 inch piece of the Berlin wall framed in our family room. My father’s coworker had some family in Berlin and they mailed him a piece of the wall. This simple piece of concrete represents the power of the people and is a testament to the supremacy of democracy over authoritarian, oppressive governments. I have visited Germany several times since 1996, and I always make a point to visit the site of the former Berlin Wall. The idea that a socially, politically, and economically oppressed population will inevitably rise up against its oppressors is a concept that inspires me greatly. The “Arab Spring” revolutions of 2011 have stirred up similar feelings as the people of the Middle East assert their will over theocratic, despotic rulers.

The second event that has influenced me was the tragic terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The first emotion that I felt as an 11 year old was paralyzing fear. My father was on a business trip to Boston over that week, and I was greatly concerned for his safety. He was fine in the end, but he couldn’t get a flight back home to Michigan for almost a week. The world that we live in today, after 9/11, is very different from the pre-9/11 world. Americans before 2001 were either oblivious to or simply didn’t care about the world’s perception of America and Americans. For the first time after 9/11, I realized that a population existed that detested everything about the American way of life. The attacks also brought homeland security and terrorism to the main stage as a political hot button issues. We are now embroiled in two virtually unwinnable wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The US military has never before been in direct conflict with such a decentralized force. These wars directly caused by the 9/11 terrorist attacks have been pivotal in my personal political views. While the attacks called for some kind of retribution, the invasion of two sovereign states is not the best plan of action. The political stability in these countries was destroyed, and the American forces have to continue to occupy these states to prevent civil war or other types of violent political unrest. I hope that the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan end soon so the American troops can come home, and stop being an international police force funded by American tax dollars.

Both the fall of the Berlin Wall and the 9/11 terrorist attacks have been fundamental in the shaping of my world view. The power of the people in Berlin stirs deep emotion for me, and it is a testament to the supremacy of democracy. The 9/11 attacks were a horrible and frightening time for all Americans, but the hasty response by the Bush Administration to the Islamic extremists has been crucial in the formation of my personal political viewpoints. While these two major, international events have shaped me into the person that I am today, I am certain that there will be many more international situations in the future that will continue to influence and affect all Americans.