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Gradual processes of democratic and economic change are just as important as momentous events in the history of states and their citizens. Few events in international politics evoke as much euphoria and hopes for the future as the fall of an authoritarian regime or the sudden move to reform.

The metaphors used to describe processes of transformation are often rife with dramatic symbolism. Several historic upheavals of the past offer powerful imagery upon which the collective memory of those monitoring political trends can draw: the literal laceration of the Iron Curtain in Hungary; Nelson Mandela's assumption of office, which signaled a new era for South Africa; Boris Yeltsin riding atop a tank to defend democracy in Moscow; the fall of Saddam's statue in Baghdad; or the streets of Kiev draped in orange in protest of electoral fraud.