Europe and the End of the Cold War
A reappraisal

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Soviet, French and British qualms about Kohl's rush to German unification

Jacques Lévesque

The objections of the USSR, France and Britain to rapid German unification are generally well known. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the following basic points. First, the disquiet of the three powers had something fundamental in common: a deep concern about reunification's impact on the architecture of the European system of international relations. There were of course many differences between them, but also similarities in their areas of deepest concern. Second, from a historical and political perspective it may appear surprising or at least ironic that a 'coalition' of three out of the four victors of the Second World War, who had a veto power on the international status of a united Germany, could not even slow down, let alone stop, German unification. In fact, the 'coalition' was more virtual and tentative than fully fledged. Its failure to coalesce largely explains its failure to achieve its common purpose. Third, the fact that Soviet, British and French efforts to slow down the process failed does not mean that they were wrong or unjustified, as is often assumed. Some of their concerns have even proved to be valid. On the other hand, as of now, Thatcher's fears have proved to be the most ill-founded. She believed that a united Germany was bound to seek and establish a vengeful hegemony over Europe. Fourth, what was at stake for each of the three reluctant powers varied significantly in order of magnitude. So did their losses. The USSR lost the most; France lost the least and even gained the most by putting forward its concerns. Fifth, the pace and the terms of German reunification were not inevitable. It is also wrong to assume that Gorbachev did not have any other viable option than making all the concessions he made. Mitterrand and Thatcher were right to think that he could have prevented or changed the scenario that prevailed. He could have done so by actions and means fully consistent with the basic thrust of perestroika and 'New Thinking'. Sixth, for Gorbachev and his reformist entourage the chief concern about German unification was not the issue of security and balance of power in Europe. For them, what was at stake was much more crucial: it was the question of whether the USSR would be
part Europe. Each of these points needs to be further developed, begin-
ning with last one to which all the others are directly related.

One of the main goals, if not the primary one, of Gorbachev's foreign
policy was to anchor the USSR in Europe, politically, economically and in 'civilizational' terms. This was to be achieved by the gradual overcoming
of the division of Europe. In turn, this was to be accomplished by a con-
trolled process of rapprochement between the two halves of Europe,
through bloc-to-bloc negotiations. In the process, NATO and the Warsaw
Pact were to be 'de-antagonized' and become political rather than military
organizations. They were to be gradually superseded by an institutional
and organizational reinforcement of the CSCE capable of managing the
pan-European process. The rapprochement between the two German
states was to be the result rather than the focus of the process which was to be
facilitated by a significant degree of democratization in the USSR and
the Soviet bloc.

This vision of the 'Common European Home' that had crystallized in
Soviet 'New Thinking' by 1988 was not really new. It was the same
concept of European reconciliation that had been advocated by Enrico
Berlinguer and the PCI at the time of Euro-communism. It was shared by
the West German SPD and what Berlinguer called 'the Euro-Left'. Mitter-
rand had a similar vision. Of course, the French President gave greater
priority to West European integration than did Gorbachev, who nevertheless
saw integration as a very positive trend and even as a source of inspira-
tion. It was close to the broad concept of a European confederation that
he proposed in 1989. Naturally, Thatcher, who had nothing to do with the
Euro-Left, did not share this vision. But it is interesting and significant to
note that she adopted a similar vision at the beginning of 1990, when she
advocated the strengthening of the CSCE, as a way to 'help balance
German dominance in Europe'.

Balancing and containing Germany was not the main concern of Gor-
bachev and Soviet reformers (as it was for the military and the right wing
of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)). Neither they nor
Mitterrand shared Thatcher's deep distrust of Germany. So, let us focus
on the specific forms and content of Gorbachev's chief concern. It was
voiced in a subliminal but very telling way in his famous outburst in front
of Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the German Foreign Minister, after Helmut
Kohl's surprise announcement of his ten-point plan for reunification in
the Bundestag on 28 November. Gorbachev said: 'What is meant by Con-
federation?... Where would the Federal Republic of Germany be, in
NATO or in the Warsaw Pact? Or will it perhaps become neutral? What
would NATO be without the FRG? The last sentence has to be understood
in reverse. Obviously, it was not the fate of NATO that preoccupied Gor-
bachev, but that of the Warsaw Pact. He knew perfectly well that the loss of
the GDR would spell the end of the Warsaw Pact, as proved to be the case.
It is important to fully understand what this meant for him - a total disas-
ter for his European policy. The Warsaw Pact was the USSR's main struc-
tural affiliation to Europe. It was the most important framework and
instrument for its influence in European affairs. Its disappearance without
the emergence of a strong pan-European structure to which the Soviet
Union would belong could marginalize the USSR in European political
affairs and relegate it to the fringes of Asia. This was a nightmare for even
a moderate Russian Westernizer like Gorbachev.

In a private conversation with the US Secretary of State, Jim Baker, in
February 1990, Gorbachev made it clear that the military dimension of
German unification was not his chief concern. Saying that 'there is
nothing terrifying in the prospect of a united Germany', he openly dis-
tanced himself from Thatcher's main source of anxiety. Of course, in the
flood of objections that he and Shevardnadze made to the inclusion of a
newly united Germany in NATO, they very frequently invoked the military
imbalance that it would cause. They had to convey the military's opposi-
tion as well as the geopolitical view of the world that was prevalent within
the political establishment - a view they shared to a large extent. But it
cannot be overemphasized that their and the reformers' main area of
concern was the future of Russia's place in Europe. It was part and parcel
of perestroika.

That is why, after accepting the idea of German unification, Gor-
bachev's team insisted so much on its 'synchronization' with the pan-
European process and the establishment of pan-European structures
through the institutionalization of the CSCE. The common thread
running through the cascade of confused proposals made by the Soviet
leaders to counter the inclusion of a united Germany in NATO, was the
goal of making sure that the USSR would not be left aside from the pan-
European process and would be solidly and structurally part of it. Their
proposal for Germany's simultaneous belonging to both NATO and the
Warsaw Pact was not nonsense, as is often claimed. It would have given a
new raison d'être and a new life to the Warsaw Pact and given a sound
rationale for other East European countries to remain members. Of
course, it would have compelled Germany to take Soviet interests into
account. But in order for it to endure, Moscow, in its turn, would have
had to take into account the interests of a Germany linked to NATO. As
we know, in many other instances the Soviets insisted on a neutral
Germany. They knew that without Germany, NATO would not fare much
better than the Warsaw Pact. Therefore, if the Western powers could have
been compelled to accept such an option, they would have been in a
hurry to put the creation of pan-European political and security structures
on the international agenda. The same rationale is to be seen behind Gor-
bachev's suggestion to Kohl's chief adviser that it might be time 'to get rid
of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.' The last proposal made by Gor-
bachev before his capitulation is both pathetic and revealing in this
regard. He suggested to Bush that the USSR should join NATO.
relation to his chief concern, this made sense. NATO would have become the pan-European political and security organization in which the USSR could have found its place.

Russia's place in Europe is an unresolved major problem that has painfully persisted beyond the end of the Cold War. The battle waged by Boris Yeltsin and even radical Russian Westernizers against NATO enlargement followed the very same rationale as Gorbachev's earlier struggles. Their defeat has in no small measure alienated Russia from the West. Again, the chief concern of Yeltsin and the Russian liberals was the marginalization of Russia in Europe and not the military balance. Failing to stop the process and to obtain a reinforcement of pan-European structures, Yeltsin ultimately made the same pathetic, informal request as Gorbachev, when he said during a press conference that Russia would not have a problem with the expansion of NATO if it were to be part of it.

This is not to advocate Russia's inclusion in NATO. One cannot imagine Poland and the three Baltic Republics accepting this, nor is Vladimir Putin interested in the idea anymore. It is simply intended to stress that finding a way to anchor Russia in Europe has been one of the major missed opportunities of the end of the Cold War. Given the current directions of Russian foreign policy, this objective will become more and more difficult, if not impossible to achieve.

Let us now turn to the similarities and differences between the concerns of the Soviet, French and British 'coalition' in its efforts to prevent or slow down the German unification process and to explore some of the reasons for the failure of these efforts. The 'synchronization' of German unification with the pan-European process that was central to the Soviet approach was a concept widely shared by Mitterrand. For instance, in December 1989, one month after the fall of the Berlin Wall but two months before Gorbachev accepted the idea of a united Germany, Mitterrand told him: 'It is necessary to make sure that the all-European process develops more rapidly than the German question and that it overtake the German movement. We have to create all-European structures.'

For Thatcher, the creation of pan-European structures was a much lesser concern. For her: 'The fundamental argument for slowing German reunification was to create a breathing space in which a united Germany would not be a destabilizing influence.' Her preoccupations were much more geopolitical and more centred on the 'balance of power' than were those of Mitterrand and Gorbachev. When she belatedly insisted on strengthening the CSCE, it was only one of several means 'to help balance German dominance in Europe', and it was definitely not the main one. Understanding what a united Germany's membership in NATO would mean for Gorbachev, she also saw the strengthening of the CSCE as a way 'to avoid Soviet isolation'.

If the future shape of the European international order was a shared concern, there were marked differences between the three partners' per-
be allowed to remain on the territory of the GDR for an indefinite period of time. This would have met an important concern of Gorbachev, while satisfying her own obsession with containing Germany. As a last resort, Gorbachev made a similar demand. Short of Germany's simultaneous membership in NATO and the Warsaw Pact, such an arrangement would have given him the strongest hand possible in negotiations for defining a new international order in Europe. Earlier, Genscher and even Kohl had contemplated such an option as a concession that could be offered to Gorbachev. But it was at Bush's insistence that Kohl and later Thatcher dropped the idea (it was much easier for the former to do so).

The fragile character of the 'coalition' was reflected in the fact that each of the three partners expected and wanted the other ones to take the lead role in opposing or slowing down the unification process. The record shows that even Gorbachev who had the most to lose was the first to think that France, Britain and other European countries would be on the front line. For instance, a few days before the fall of the Berlin Wall, he told Honecker's successor, Egon Krenz:

In recent talks with Margaret Thatcher, François Mitterrand, but also with Jaruzelski and Andreotti, all of these political leaders proceed from the [necessity of] safeguarding the post-war realities, including the existence of two German states. Posing the question of the unity of Germany is regarded by all of them as extremely explosive.21

Mitterrand and Thatcher relied primarily on Gorbachev. Reacting angrily to Kohl's surprise announcement of his ten-point unification plan at the Bundestag on 28 November, the French President reportedly said: 'He did not tell me anything! Nothing! I will never forget it! Gorbachev will be furious: he will not allow that to happen, it is impossible! I do not need to oppose that. The Soviets will do it for me.' Therefore, at different points in time, each partner felt let down by the others. Thatcher, who had expected a solid Franco-British axis of resistance to emerge, reproached Mitterrand for his refusal 'to follow his and French instincts and challenge German interests.' She characterized his ambivalence as 'a tendency to schizophrenia.' For his part, Gorbachev felt abandoned when Mitterrand, the least enthusiastic member of NATO, came to Moscow in late May to press him to accept the united Germany's inclusion in the Atlantic Alliance. After the Soviet leader finally accepted reunification on American and German terms, both Mitterrand and Thatcher commented bitterly about his behaviour.24 Kohl's acceptance of the inclusion of a united Germany in NATO was the price he paid for the crucial backing of the US. Obviously the US, in its unwavering support for Kohl, played the decisive role in disciplining NATO members, making the Western Alliance the main institutional player in the process.

If Mitterrand played a role in Gorbachev's capitulation on Germany's inclusion in NATO, as suggested by Frédéric Bozo, his conviction that NATO would not survive long after reunification, may also have helped bring about the Soviet leader's grudging acceptance.25 NATO's disappearance would indeed have convinced everyone of the urgent need to build the new European security system Gorbachev sought. As argued above, of the members of the 'coalition' it was Mitterrand who gained the most from their common reluctance. In order to conciliate him, Kohl agreed to make important steps that he would otherwise have been hesitant about taking on the road that led to Maastricht and the formation of a European Union.26 Mitterrand had a weaker hand than Gorbachev, but he played it much better.

Before turning to Gorbachev's poor performance, it must be stressed that another common concern of Thatcher and Mitterrand for the future of Europe was well founded. This was their fear that Kohl's manhandling of Hans Modrow and the GDR and his rush to unification, ran the risk of causing Gorbachev's rapid downfall. The Russian leader did not need to spell out this danger to Mitterrand for him to take it very seriously. And rightly so. Even now, it still seems amazing that a coup was not attempted against Gorbachev before August 1991. The terms imposed by the US for the international status of the new Germany as a full-fledged member of NATO were very harsh. Condoleezza Rice and Philip Zelikow, who at different levels were part of the US negotiating teams, are very candid about this. They write that the US goals were set as 'if the Soviet Union suffered a reversal of fortunes not unlike a catastrophic defeat in a war.' Indeed, they note, 'the United States had decided to try to achieve the unification of Germany absolutely and unequivocally on Western terms.'27 Given the traditional Soviet view of the world, given Gorbachev's catastrophic setbacks in Germany and Eastern Europe at the end of 1989 and the Baltic Republics' proclamation of independence in March 1990, there was every reason to expect an attempt to overthrow him. Had a coup occurred in the spring of 1990, it would have had a much better chance of success than the later attempt had. Therefore, even if successful, Kohl's and Bush's course of action was nevertheless a risky one. What history records as great statecraft may often be, to a considerable extent, a matter of luck.

History is contingent. German reunification did not have to happen the way it did. If Gorbachev lost the most, it is first of all due to inconsistencies in his policies. Let us explore why.

Given the reforms that Gorbachev was pursuing in the USSR and the direction of his foreign policy, the demise of Honecker and his policies was bound to happen and to lead at least to a significant rapprochement between the two German states. But he completely failed to anticipate such a situation. He admitted to this author that it was only after the downfall of the Berlin Wall, that he began thinking about specific forms of rapprochement:
My trip to the GDR in the summer of 1989 convinced me that changes were becoming inevitable. But when and how? No one could predict it. Incidentally, it seemed to me that the rapprochement of the German states was inevitable, but that the process leading to it would take a long time.... In any case, it was a task which did not yet require concrete practical solutions.\(^{28}\)

This is particularly surprising given that several Soviet reformers had for some time been thinking through precisely this problem. As early as 1987, in the very spirit of New Thinking and the Common European Home, Vyacheslav Dashichev, a researcher from the Institute of the Economy of the World Socialist System, had developed such ideas, in a confidential presentation made at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.\(^{29}\) The core of his argument was that if the division of Europe was to be overcome in a decisive manner, it had to be addressed in the country where it was the most acute – in Germany. He outlined all the international advantages that the USSR could draw from taking the initiative and proposing, for instance, a confederation of the two German states. Two months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, at the beginning of September 1989, none other than the head of the International department of the CPSU Central Committee, the Germanist Valentin Falin, suggested such a scenario to Western visitors, thereby implying that it might soon become Soviet policy. Falin argued that a confederation would have allowed each of the German states to remain in their own alliance, at least for an initial period of time. It is therefore surprising that even after the collapse of the Wall, Gorbachev did not take the initiative in making such a proposal. It is all the more surprising when one considers that bold initiatives were a trademark of his foreign policy. For instance, his bold initiatives in arms control had captured the imagination of political observers and earned him enormous political capital in Europe and around the world.

This was not, however, the only inconsistency of his policy nor the only missed opportunity. On the one hand, he advocated reform and some degree of democratization for Eastern Europe, in a philosophical manner, so to speak. On the other, he did nothing specific to press for change in Stalinist regimes like the Czech and the East German ones.\(^{30}\) Before Honecker’s fall, he was careful not to give explicit signs of support to leaders like Modrow, whom Gorbachev’s reformist entourage saw as the most desirable leader for the GDR and for Soviet interests. Had he had pressed for Honecker’s departure and his replacement with someone like Modrow, in 1988 or as late as the spring of 1989, this most probably would have happened. The pace, forms and content of German re-unification could then have been entirely different.

It is important to note here that in 1988 and the first half of 1989, all significant opposition forces in East Germany were in favour of two German states. Even as late as a month after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a poll showed that 71 per cent of East Germans preferred a separate state, while barely 27 per cent favoured unification.\(^{31}\) It was only in the following weeks that a more or less grassroots movement for unification developed and turned into a tidal wave. ‘Those who come late are punished by life’, Gorbachev told Honecker. This precept was one he should perhaps have heeded more himself, as he later admitted. In the weeks or months before what could be considered the first breach in the Berlin wall that took place in Hungary in the late summer of 1989, a joint initiative by Gorbachev and an enlarged reformist Communist GDR government led by someone like Modrow, to propose some type of confederation of the two German states could have changed the course of history in Germany and in Europe. The initiative would have, for some time at least, given some popular legitimacy to the East German regime. The political credit and revolutionary international momentum would have been on the Soviet side. Gorbachev would have been in a much better position to set the agenda and negotiate the international terms of the inter-German process, in the context of a relatively more stable GDR.

The decisive importance of seizing the initiative in order to deprive the USSR of possible political benefits is demonstrated by Kohl’s motivations and behaviour in November 1989. Given Gorbachev’s disarray and his initial decision to try to hold fast to the international status quo in the weeks following the fall of the Berlin Wall, Falin failed to persuade him to take the initiative and propose a German confederation. Falin had suggested to Gorbachev the more prudent concept of a ‘contractual community’ of the two German states put forward by Modrow on 17 November. Gorbachev met this idea too with a similar lack of enthusiasm.\(^{32}\) Nevertheless, Falin’s associate, Portugalov, in meeting with Kohl’s advisor, Horst Teltschik on 21 November, told him that the idea of a confederation was being discussed by the Soviet leadership and let him believe that it could become Soviet policy.\(^{33}\) We know that it was this information that prompted Kohl to rush to prepare and present to the Bundestag his famous ten-point plan for unification, which shook the whole world. The record clearly shows that he felt the urgency of grabbing the initiative before the Soviets did. He wanted to avoid international attention and discussion being focused on a confederal formula.\(^{34}\) Even though it was very late for the Soviets to reap any really decisive advantages from such an initiative, Kohl sensed that they could have gained substantial benefits in the negotiations to come from acting first. Not knowing how these negotiations would turn out, Kohl wanted to keep some room for manoeuvre. It is interesting to note that, until late January 1990, he therefore avoided making a firm commitment in favour of a united Germany belonging to NATO.\(^{35}\) During a press conference in mid-January, when asked if a united Germany would be in NATO, he answered that it was too early to say. Such a statement worried the Bush administration. Until then, and given that unification had
January 1990, when Modrow and Gorbachev did propose a confederation to work out new pan-European structures, the Soviet Union proposed a separation. As we know, Kohl, with immediate American support, categorically refused. But Moscow could have dug in its heels on this issue. Of course, Gorbachev knew that blocking or postponing the resolution of the international status of Germany could have spoiled Soviet relations with a major, if not the main, European player. As we know, he made the NATO concession to Kohl directly rather than in the framework of negotiations with the US. Failing to get the USSR included in Europe on his terms, he opted for the benefit of founding a new and privileged relationship with Germany. To this day, from Yeltsin to Putin, this has been the most enduring success of his foreign policy. However it has not resolved the much more important issue of Russia’s place in Europe which has only become harder, if still possible, to pin down.

Notes

1 See Marie Pierre Rey, Chapter 2, this volume.
3 This became the official Soviet view. The European Community was said to represent a ‘fundamentally progressive trend towards the reinforcement of interdependence between states’. See ‘Evropeiskoe soobshchestvo segodnia. Tezisy Instituta mirovoi ekonomiki i mezhdunarodnykh otношений AN SSSR’, Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otношения, No. 12, 1988, pp. 5–19.
7 Ironically and sadly for them, most of the face-saving concessions they could get related to military matters: maximum troop levels in Germany as a whole and no NATO military deployment on the territory of the former GDR.
8 See Ts KhSD, 89-kollektsia, perechen’ 9, dokument 100, ‘Ykazaniia dlia besedy Ministra inostrannykh del SSSR c Presidentom SShA, Dj. Bushem’.
11 Ibid., p. 277.
14 Quoted by Albrecht (2002).
16 See Bozo (2005).
18 Quoted by Alter (2000, p. 133).
Gorbachev’s consent to united Germany’s membership of NATO

Hannes Adomeit

The prospect of German reunification had been an important topic of international discussion in the autumn of 1989. But the opening of the Berlin Wall on 9 November transformed the discussion of reunification from a mere theoretical possibility to the single most important topic on the agenda of international politics. This, in turn, raised the question not only of the internal structure of the new Germany but also of its external status. Concerning the latter, the basic question was whether a unified Germany should be neutral or a member of NATO – or perhaps, absurd as this may seem in retrospect, a member of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

Gorbachev and the Atlantic alliance: stage one

The evolution of Gorbachev’s thinking on German unification, NATO and the all-European process took place in the context of Soviet ‘New Thinking’. During the Cold War, NATO had provided the vital link between the US and Europe, and the American military presence constituted the foremost guarantee of European security. Consequently, as Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze was to acknowledge in February 1990: ‘Until quite recently our aim was to oust the Americans from Europe at any price.’ The advocates of the ‘New Thinking’, however, adopted the point of view that the effects of a withdrawal of the US and thus the de facto dissolution of NATO would be destabilizing. A withdrawal of American forces would create insecurity amongst West European countries and encourage them to enhance their military integration. This would duplicate US defence efforts and work to the detriment of the Soviet Union. It could also induce European states, acting individually or multilaterally, to produce and deploy nuclear weapons. The US presence had served as a restraint on West German nuclear ambitions. If the Americans were to leave, Bonn could demand its own nuclear weapons.

Such perceptions were endorsed by Gorbachev as early as 1986. In talks with West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, he said that he had no wish to undermine NATO: ‘We are of the opinion that, given..."
the alliances that have taken shape, it is essential to strengthen those threads whose severance is fraught with the danger of a rupture of the world fabric. To Henry Kissinger, in January 1989, he expressed the opinion that the Europeans needed the participation of the USSR and the US in the 'all-European process.' Stability in Europe was a 'common interest.' Similarly, during his visit to Bonn, in June 1989, he told his German hosts that the Joint Soviet–German Declaration adopted on that occasion:

does not demand that you, or we, should renounce our uniqueness or weaken our allegiance to the alliances. On the contrary, I am confident that maintaining [this allegiance] in our policies will serve to consolidate the contribution of each state to the creation of a peaceful European order as well as to shape a common European outlook.5

In Gorbachev’s perceptions in 1989, the prospect of German unification even enhanced rather than detracted from the importance of the two military alliances. ‘Now is not the time to break up the established international political and economic institutions’, he told visiting French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas shortly after the opening of the Berlin wall. ‘Let them be transformed, taking into account internal processes, let them find their place in the new situation and work together.’6 Similarly, in a briefing for the leaders of the Warsaw Pact on the Soviet–American summit meeting on Malta in December 1989, he stated that the two alliances ‘will be preserved for the foreseeable future’ because they could make a ‘contribution to strengthening European security’ by becoming a bridge between the two parts of Europe.7

It could be argued that such arguments predetermined the Soviet consent to membership of a unified Germany in NATO. This, however, was not the case. In mid-February 1990, both the Western and the Soviet position on Germany’s future security status were only beginning to take shape. Ambiguity surrounded both positions. The Western preference for a unified Germany’s alliance membership was muddled by the discussion of whether the whole of Germany should be a member of the Atlantic Alliance politically but remain outside its military organization (that is, have a status similar to that of France); what ‘association’ with the Atlantic Alliance would be all about; and what was meant by the extension of NATO’s ‘jurisdiction’.

Gorbachev was torn between various positions. He recognized the dangers of Versailles but did not seem to be averse to a neutralized Germany. He allocated important security functions to the Atlantic alliance and American forces in Europe but opposed the logical extension of this framework to unified Germany’s membership in NATO. He agreed with chancellor Helmut Kohl to let the Germans decide the form and speed of unification but left open the question of whether this also applied to its external aspects, including the right of the Germans to decide to which alliance, if any, they wanted to belong.8

However, in late February, all the ambiguities and with it any flexibility in negotiations seemed to dissipate, and on both sides. In what amounted to a reversal of the American position, at a meeting at Camp David on 24 February, Bush and Kohl agreed that:

a unified Germany should remain a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, including participation in its military structure. We agreed that US military forces should remain stationed in the united Germany and elsewhere in Europe as a continuing guarantor of stability. The Chancellor and I are also in agreement that in a unified state, the former territory of the GDR should have a special military status [that] would take into account the legitimate security interests of all interested countries, including those of the Soviet Union.9

This position remained firm throughout all the subsequent negotiations with Moscow.

Stage two: Soviet retrenchment

The turn to a more uncompromising Soviet stance occurred roughly at the same time. With a view to the upcoming Two Plus Four negotiations, Gorbachev warned that Moscow would resist Western efforts to dictate the proceedings: ‘We rule out such a method’, he said in an interview with Pravda published on 21 February, ‘whereby three or four [countries] first come to an arrangement between themselves and then set out their already agreed-upon position before the participants. This is unacceptable.’10 On the form which an agreement should take, he thought that there should be a peace treaty. On substance, the treaty should provide for a role for both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and he called any change in the military–strategic balance between the two alliances ‘impermissible.’11

New and more intransigent inflections on the German security issue also surfaced in the foreign ministry. Shevardnadze formed a working group to deal with the German problem and the Two Plus Four negotiations, and on 24 February assembled the Ministry of Foreign Affair’s Collegium, including his deputies and 14 other officials, ostensibly to drive firm stakes into the international negotiation ground. The Collegium derided the ‘prescriptions advanced in some Western countries’ and specifically the idea that the NATO membership of a unified Germany would be in the Soviet interest. It was unacceptable that anyone but the Soviet leaders and people themselves should seek to determine what constituted the essence of Soviet security and how best to safeguard it. The USSR had its own notions as to how to do this and ‘certainly, any variants envisaging the membership of unified Germany in NATO do not correspond to these notions.’12

Gorbachev now also retracted his position that unification was the prerogative of the Germans themselves. He objected to a procedure whereby
the Germans agree among themselves and then propose that the others only endorse the decisions already adopted by them.' Similarly, on 6 March, during the second and last of Hans Modrow’s visits to Moscow, he even eschewed the terms ‘German unity’ and ‘unification’, asserting instead that it was ‘by no means a matter of indifference how the rapprochement (sblizhenie) of the two German states takes place.’ He also warned that the ‘fanning of speculation, the tendency to annex the GDR, and the policy of creating faits accomplis do not correspond to a responsible approach to a solution of a problem as sensitive to the fate of Europe and the world as the German question.’ In other words, article 23 of the Federal Republic’s constitution as the point of departure for unification was definitely out of the question.

This apparently firm stance has, however, like many previous Soviet positions, been severely undercut by the course of events. The parliamentary elections in East Germany on 18 March produced a stunning victory for the conservative parties, which polled 48 per cent of the vote. The SPD, which had been regarded as the front-runner, received only 22 per cent, and the PDS 16 per cent. The most disastrous performance was that of the Alliance 90, the umbrella party for groups like the Neue Forum that had been in the forefront of the democratic revolution of the preceding year; it garnered less than 3 per cent of the vote. No reform socialism in the GDR, then, but clarity that the new government under Prime Minister Lothar de Maizière (CDU) would not support anything but Kohl’s preference for unification under article 23.

This did not deter the Politburo from reiterating what had now become an untenable position. The reiteration came in the form of Politburo ‘instructions’ (direktivy) for Shevardnadze for his talks with Bush and Baker in Washington on 4–6 April. They were issued on 2 April on the basis of a draft that had been prepared a few days earlier and sponsored by Shevardnadze, Defence Minister Yazov, KGB chief Kryuchkov, Politburo foreign policy kurator Yakovlev, Central Committee secretary for the military industry Baklanov, and Deputy Prime Minister Belousov. Shevardnadze was instructed to emphasize to Bush and Baker that:

the unification process should take place not in the form of an Anschluss of the GDR but should be the result of agreements between the two German states as equal subjects of international law. We should emphasize that, naturally, we favour the existence of the GDR as an independent state for as long as possible.

Concerning the external aspects of unification, Gorbachev now dispelled Western hopes to the effect that his and Shevardnadze’s failure to demand a neutral status for unified Germany had presaged Soviet consent to NATO membership. In reference to the talks between Gorbachev and Modrow, TASS reported:

It was stated with full determination [at the talks] that the inclusion of a future Germany in NATO is inadmissible and will not take place, whatever arguments may be used. One cannot allow the breakdown of the balance [of power] in Europe, the basis of stability and security, and of mutual trust and cooperation.

On the face of it, this settled the question: unified Germany’s membership in NATO was unacceptable. Other solutions had to be found. The Politburo directives confirmed this position:

We should emphasize that the most appropriate form of a German settlement would be a peace treaty that would draw the line under the past war and determine the military-political status of Germany. It should have as its necessary elements the partial demilitarization and the establishment of a reasonable sufficiency (razumnaia dostatochnost) for the armed forces… If Baker were to react negatively to the idea of a peace treaty, we should inquire about his vision of the forms for a peace settlement with Germany.

At the beginning of May, in what Gorbachev’s foreign policy adviser Anatoly Chernyaev called a ‘rough’ (zheshchii) meeting, the full Politburo discussed the German problem for the first and last time. Shevardnadze, assisted by his adviser Tarasenko, had prepared a position paper which, following by then well-established practice, was redrafted and turned in a more uncompromising direction by the Third Department of the foreign ministry. The paper was to serve as a point of reference for his upcoming participation in the first round of the Two Plus Four negotiations in Bonn. It was co-sponsored by Yakovlev, Yazov, and Kryuchkov but was apparently still not tough enough to satisfy the more conservative Politburo members, including prominent and influential Politburo member Ligachev, who severely criticized it. Furthermore, with the exception of Shevardnadze, the sponsors of the new directives remained silent. Gorbachev sided with the conservative majority faction. He burst out heatedly at one point, stating categorically: ‘We will not let Germany into NATO, and that is the end of it. I will even risk the collapse of the [CPE] negotiations in Vienna and START but will not allow this.’

Notwithstanding his seemingly inalienable negative stance, within just a few weeks of his outburst, Gorbachev did consent to a unified Germany in NATO. What had happened?

Stage three: the consent to NATO membership

When Chernyaev was asked when it was that Gorbachev changed his mind he unhesitatingly replied: ‘At the Soviet–American summit.’ When the supplementary question was put to him, what had induced him to do so, the answer was equally short and precise: ‘Baker’s nine points’.
From 16 to 19 May, Baker had again visited Moscow and talked to Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, with the German problem as the main focus of discussion. The Secretary of State presented a comprehensive package of (nine) incentives designed to persuade Gorbachev to accept the basic foundation of all subsequent and supplementary measures for a German settlement. The incentives were as follows: the limitation of the size of armed forces in Europe, including in Central Europe, in a CFE agreement, with further reductions to be provided for in CFE follow-on negotiations; the earlier start of arms control negotiations on short-range nuclear missiles; a reaffirmation by Germany that it would neither possess nor produce nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons; the pledge that no NATO forces would be stationed on the former territory of the GDR during a specified transition period; an appropriate transition period to be agreed upon for the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from German territory; a comprehensive review of NATO strategy and a change of NATO’s conventional and nuclear force posture; a settlement of Germany’s future borders, that is, essentially confirmation of the Polish–German frontier; the enhancement of the functions of the CSCE to ensure a significant role for the Soviet Union in Europe and linkage of a summit meeting of that organization with the finalization of a CFE treaty, both to take place at the end of 1990; and the development of Germany’s economic ties with the Soviet Union, including the fulfilment of the GDR’s economic obligations to the USSR.

In the subsequent weeks, however, it seemed as if the nine points had made no impact whatsoever. At the Two Plus Four negotiating table and at home, Soviet representatives still vacillated between the various mutually incompatible positions they had advanced earlier. The breakthrough in the controversy about Germany’s security status occurred only at the Soviet–American summit in Washington, 30 May–3 June.

On 31 May, in response to President Bush’s review of the assurances, Gorbachev initially reiterated the intransigent Soviet position (letting a united Germany join only NATO would ‘unbalance’ Europe), and he repeated the alternatives he preferred: Germany should either be a member of both alliances or not belong to any alliance. Shevardnadze supported the dual membership idea and Gorbachev added that perhaps any country could join either alliance, musing whether the Soviet Union should apply for NATO membership. The American president then introduced an argument that other US and West German officials had begun to employ at lower levels. Under the CSCE’s principles in the Helsinki Final Act, all nations had the right to choose their own alliances. Should Germany, too, not have the right to decide for itself which alliance it wanted to join? Gorbachev nodded and agreed in a matter-of-fact way that Germany did have such a right.

This constituted de facto consent to unified Germany’s membership in NATO and came completely unexpectedly. But from the American view-point, it was important to ascertain whether Gorbachev’s change of position was merely a lapsus linguae and temporary aberration or a radical change of position. If the latter, it was important to induce Gorbachev to commit himself publicly to it. Prompted by a note from one of the participants, Bush said: ‘I am gratified that you and I seem to agree that nations can choose their own alliances.’ Gorbachev confirmed this by saying: ‘So we will put it this way. The United States and the Soviet Union are in favour of Germany deciding herself [after a Two Plus Four settlement] in which alliance she would like to participate.’

There was great surprise and consternation among the Soviet participants. In the meeting room, they almost physically distanced themselves from Gorbachev’s remarks. There had been no prior consultation or coordination. Gorbachev had acted unilaterally and spontaneously. Even Chernyaev had not been alerted to the impending change of his chief’s position. As for a public commitment to the change of position, the NSC staff prepared a statement for the president to deliver on 3 June, at the end of the summit. It submitted the draft statement to Soviet ambassador Alexander Bessmernykh for his review and approval by Gorbachev. There were no objections. The statement read:

On the matter of Germany’s external alliances, I believe, as do Chancellor Kohl and members of the Alliance, that the united Germany should be a full member of NATO. President Gorbachev, frankly, does not hold that view. But we are in full agreement that the matter of alliance membership is, in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act, a matter for the Germans to decide.

Yet, it would seem that at this stage Gorbachev’s change of position was neither unconditional nor irreversible. For him, vaguely and incongruously, there still existed different options, one of which would somehow make it possible to avoid Germany’s full membership in NATO. Such ambiguities were reflected in his public stance. On 12 June, in his report on the Soviet–American summit to the Supreme Soviet, Gorbachev said that he had ‘told the [American] president that I think that the American presence in Europe, since it fulfills a certain role in maintaining stability, is an element of the strategic situation and does not represent a problem for us.’ He also outlined a solution, according to which ‘the Bundeswehr would, as before, be subordinate to NATO, and the East German troops would be subordinate to the new Germany’, which obviously meant that they would no longer be subordinate to the Warsaw Pact. However, this applied only to a ‘transition period’. What, if anything, would happen thereafter was left open.

The murky security waters were muddied further by the ideas, all mentioned in his report, of ‘associate membership’ of the GDR in the Warsaw Pact, a unified Germany having to ‘honour all obligations’ inherited from
the two Germanys, and by his return to the ‘dual membership’ proposal. Only one thing was crystal clear: there was a complete and deliberate lack of clarity in the Soviet stance, except for the fact that the notion of a unified Germany in NATO as being absolutely unacceptable was no longer valid.

This became apparent in the Two Plus Four meetings at foreign ministers’ level where clarification was achieved as to the form that NATO’s first eastward expansion could take. It was agreed that non-integrated German units could be stationed in the former GDR immediately after Germany regained full sovereignty; that German NATO-integrated forces could be stationed after the withdrawal of Soviet troops but no allied forces; that Germany would not produce or possess nuclear, bacteriological, or chemical weapons; that NATO would transform its structure and its role in Europe, emphasizing its political role; and that Germany would strive for a rearrangement of German–Soviet political and economic relations in a comprehensive bilateral treaty and accept the Polish–German borders as final. Favourable conditions were also created by the commitment of the G7 to assist the Soviet Union financially; Lithuania’s suspension of its declaration of independence; and the emasculation of the conservative opposition of Soviet party and foreign ministry officials as well as military officers.

The formal consent to unified Germany’s membership in NATO occurred during Chancellor Kohl’s visit to the Soviet Union from 14 to 16 July. On 11 July, in a letter to Kohl, Gorbachev had confirmed his invitation to the German chancellor to visit the Soviet Union, including the suggestion for a side-trip to Stavropol, the town and krai where he had grown up and begun his career, and the small North Caucasian mountain resort of Arkhyz, about 100 miles south of the city. The suggestion was obviously meant to provide a personal touch to the visit and set the stage for a repetition of the informal conversations which the two leaders had had in June 1989 along the banks of the Rhine. On 15 July in Moscow, the two leaders exchanged papers on the provisions to be contained in a treaty on partnership and cooperation between the Soviet Union and Germany. Gorbachev acknowledged that Germany should regain full sovereignty. On the central issue of NATO, Gorbachev said that membership were settled on 16 July in Arkhyz and the final agreement was announced at the neighbouring spa of Zheleznovodsk as follows. The unified Germany was to comprise the Federal Republic, the GDR and Berlin. The rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers would end after the achievement of German unification, and unified Germany was to enjoy full and unrestricted sovereignty. The unified Germany, exercising its unrestricted sovereignty and in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act, could decide freely and by itself which alliance it wanted to belong to. The unified Germany and the Soviet Union were to conclude a bilateral treaty providing for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the GDR within three to four years. Another treaty was to cover the consequences of the introduction of the Deutschmark in the GDR for this transitional period. For as long as Soviet troops remain stationed on the territory of the former GDR, NATO structures would not be extended to this part of Germany. The immediate applicability of articles five and six of the NATO treaty would remain in effect. Non-integrated units of the Bundeswehr – that is, units of the Territorial Defence – were, by contrast, allowed to be stationed immediately after unification on the territory of the GDR and Berlin. Troops of the three Western powers were to remain in Berlin for so long as Soviet troops remained within the former GDR. The Federal government undertook to conclude corresponding agreements with the three Western governments. The Federal government expressed its willingness to make a binding declaration in the CFE talks in Vienna to reduce the level of the armed forces of a unified Germany to 370,000 men within a period of three to four years. And the unified Germany would refrain from producing, storing, or controlling nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and continue to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

**Summary and conclusions**

Gorbachev, in Chernenkov’s view, had changed his mind at the Soviet–American summit at the end of May 1990, and one of his reasons had been Baker’s nine points. He also mentioned two more substantial reasons: first, Gorbachev was impressed by the reasoning that a neutral Germany could, and one day might, seek access to nuclear weapons. Second: ‘The West had the better arguments.’ These included the idea that the presence of the United States on the European continent in NATO did not stand in contradiction to all-European processes but could
be reconciled with them. One does get the feeling, however, that Gorbachev's foreign policy adviser was more convinced of the validity of this argument than Gorbachev. The representatives of the main institutions of the Soviet system never accepted it.

Another factor explaining Gorbachev's consent needs to be added: in the spring of 1990 the Soviet Union was running out of options – for two reasons. First, the idea of a neutralization of Germany failed to attract support not only in Western Europe and in the US but also in Eastern Europe. Second, notions such as 'associate membership' of the eastern part of Germany in the Warsaw Pact or 'dual membership' of unified Germany in both alliances were rendered obsolete by the rapid disintegration of the eastern alliance.

At the February 1990 Open Skies foreign ministers' meeting of NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Ottawa, only two foreign ministers called for the neutralization of Germany: Shevardnadze and East Germany's Oskar Fischer. This line-up was repeated at the mid-March Warsaw Pact foreign ministers' conference in Prague. Czechoslovak foreign minister Jiri Dienstbier said that neutrality would be 'the worst alternative'.

The Polish foreign minister, Krystof Skubiszewski, too, stated that a neutral Germany would 'not be good for Europe'; it would 'foster some tendencies in Germany to be a great power acting on its own.'

When the East German foreign minister was replaced a few weeks later as a result of the free elections in the GDR, this left the Soviet Union as the only country in Europe more or less seriously discussing the neutrality option.

As for the Warsaw Pact, as late as 12 June Gorbachev – reporting to the Supreme Soviet on the results of the Soviet-American summit in Washington – stated that the rival blocs would continue to exist 'for longer than might be imagined. Was there a direct connection between Gorbachev's consent to membership of united Germany in NATO and the continued existence of the Warsaw Pact? In all likelihood there was, and the reason why may lie in the willingness of the Soviet political and, nolens volens, the military to convert the Warsaw Pact from an instrument of Soviet domination and control into a political institution respecting the sovereignty of its member states. A transformation of the Warsaw Pact, they hoped, would be feasible even after the systemic changes in Eastern Europe because the 'state interests' of the member countries of the pact would remain essentially unchanged.

The Soviet reform concept was presented to the Pact members at the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee (PCC), essentially a Warsaw Pact summit conference, on 7 June 1990 in Moscow. The declaration adopted at the summit stipulated that efforts would be initiated 'to transform it [the Warsaw Treaty] into a treaty of sovereign, equal states that is based on democratic principles.' The 'character, functions, and activities of the Warsaw Pact' were to be thoroughly reviewed. The organization was to change from a military alliance to a political organization with military consultation; the centralized, Soviet-controlled command structure was to be abandoned, which in practice meant that a Soviet deputy minister of defence would no longer be the pact's commander-in-chief and that perhaps the Supreme Joint Command would be dissolved; the member states would gain control of their own national forces in conformity with the principle of full national sovereignty; and for the duration of the existence of multilateral institutions representatives of the member states would fill positions by rotation.

However, as Georgy Shakhnazarov, Gorbachev's adviser on Eastern European affairs, recognized, most of the Warsaw Pact member countries, while negotiating reform, or appearing to do so, were at the same time preparing to leave that organization. Above all, the new governments in three of the four countries where Soviet troops were still stationed – Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary – made it clear that they wanted the Soviet forces out as quickly as possible. This put the Soviet Union in an awkward position. In the preceding era, its armed forces had fulfilled important political and strategic functions, foremost, to maintain its vassals in power and safeguard the empire against external threats. In the form of status of forces agreements, their presence had legal justification. But after the revolutions of 1989, these rationales no longer existed: the socio-economic systems had changed fundamentally; NATO was no longer regarded as a threat; and the legal basis of the presence of Soviet troops had been called into question. The practical repercussions of these developments on the Soviet forces in Germany were considerable: if the Northern, Central, and Southern Groups of Forces were to be withdrawn, the Western Group of Forces in Germany would find itself in a militarily untenable position. Its supply lines would be cut. Furthermore, after the 18 March elections, these forces would find themselves in a political environment that would make them an unwanted anachronism. Thus, the universal lack of support for a neutralized Germany, the failure of the effort to convince the new Eastern European governments of the attractiveness of a reformed Warsaw Pact, and with Soviet forces being asked to leave the area, Gorbachev had little option but to accede to Western demands.

Notes
1 These issues are explored in more detail in Adomeit (1998).
2 Shevardnadze in Izvestia, 19.2.1990.
3 Soviet News (London), No. 29 (July 1986).
Policy makers are used to hearing that when something bad happens in the world, it was their fault — but that when something good happens, they were not a factor. So as one who played a certain supporting role in these events on the US side, I find it nice to return to a period in which American diplomacy, by most accounts, got it right. American diplomacy during the period of German unification has been widely praised for its skill, foresight, and unwavering support for the goal of a united Germany. ‘If America has so much as hesitated’, German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher later said, ‘we could have stood on our heads’ and gotten nowhere.1

If the ‘how’ of the story has been well told, the ‘why’ has been somewhat neglected. From the beginning, the ‘German Question’ in American eyes was intertwined with the goal of European integration, so the conduct of American diplomacy during the period was embedded in a certain conception of Europe’s future — one that sometimes put us at odds with our European allies, particularly France. The American vision was of an expanded ‘Euro-Atlantic’ community, in which a more united Europe that included the new democracies farther east would remain embedded in an overarching transatlantic security framework. The slogans ‘Europe whole and free’ and the ‘new Atlanticism’ were meant to capture this vision, which was often at odds with a growing European conception of a freestanding ‘post-Yalta’ European order focused principally on western Europe, with eastern Europe coming into this picture only after economic, monetary, and political union were well advanced.

The ‘first draft’ of the history of this period was told through press accounts, unclassified official documents, interviews, and memoirs, mainly from the German, American and, to a lesser extent, Russian perspectives. Over the past decade, newly declassified documents from the German, Russian and American archives, a sampling of which are cited in this chapter, have helped enrich and for the most part substantiate the judgements reached in these early accounts.

We are now in the early stages of the ‘second draft’ of the history of German unification, in which new accounts, some based on privileged
access to archival material not yet made public, have offered new or revisionist accounts of French, British, and Russian diplomacy during the period. These accounts have contributed to a deeper and more multi-layered understanding, especially of French and British diplomacy. The passage of time also may provide a more balanced perspective on this period than was possible in contemporaneous accounts. Yet European scholarship published during a particularly bitter period in transatlantic relations under President George W. Bush beginning in 2001, risks transferring current antipathies to the historical record of a very different Bush Administration a decade earlier. The phenomenon of seeing Europe as ‘not-America’ may have spilled over to historiography as well.  

There is also the danger of ‘selection bias’, as historians marshal new evidence supporting a particular interpretation and impose an air of historical determinism to a period that was in fact highly contingent. In particular, scholarship aiming to assert European ‘ownership’ of this period, while a welcome contribution to the literature, may have the effect of replacing the America-centric historiography of the immediate post-unification period with a revisionist Eurocentric interpretation.  

A counterfactual: unification gone bad  

With these considerations in mind, let me try telling the story a different way, by means of a counterfactual scenario. Let us imagine that German unification came out badly – very badly. What might that have looked like, and how might it have happened? This may help to frame the role the United States actually played during the period.  

In his celebrated essay, ‘If Grant had Been Drinking at Appomattox’, James Thurber imagined how the American Civil War might have ended differently if an inebriated General Grant had surrendered to General Lee rather accepting Lee’s surrender. It may be instructive to apply a similar device here, as a way of opening our minds to alternative possibilities.  

First, let us imagine that instead of siding with Chancellor Kohl, President George H.W. Bush had joined Thatcher, Mitterand and Gorbachev in resisting unification and trying to assert Four-Power control over the process. Instead of the dozens of phone calls and meetings with German leaders to coordinate our strategy to facilitate unification, imagine that we snubbed the Germans and undertook this kind of intense coordination with Britain, France and the USSR to oppose it. The Bush Administration, in this scenario, would have insisted that unification was ‘not on the agenda’ and chastised Kohl for moving too fast. We would have convened urgent meetings of the Four Powers to dictate the terms and timetable for inter-German rapprochement.  

Where would all this have led? Let us speculate. Germans in the Federal Republic would have repudiated Four-Power authority over their national future. The actions of their supposed allies would have generated huge resentment, which would have spilled over to protests against the allied military presence on their territory. Public attitudes toward NATO and even the EC would have been poisoned. Meanwhile, the GDR in this scenario would have imploded nonetheless. By the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the forces of disintegration could no longer have been checked. A drive toward unity was coming, whether the world was ready for it or not. Abandoned by their allies, the Germans would have had no choice but to cut the best deal they could with the Soviet Union, which held effective veto power owing to its 400,000 troops in East Germany. The price the Germans would have had to pay for unification might have been steep. At a minimum it would have entailed restrictions on German sovereignty, a continued role for the Four Powers into the indefinite future, and Germany’s withdrawal from NATO and the Western European Union.  

This line of thinking is not entirely fanciful, by the way. In February 1990, I sent to President Bush a list of theoretically possible security outcomes – 18 in all – that began with a reunified Germany with its sovereignty restored and its alliance relationships intact, and ended with a neutralized, demilitarized Germany. The ultimate outcome was number two on the list – a fully sovereign Germany with its alliances intact but with certain restrictions on military activities in the territory of the former GDR – but this happy outcome was by no means a foregone conclusion. We worried a great deal that the outcome might be much worse. Indeed, at his meeting with Bush at Camp David in February, Chancellor Kohl floated the idea of a ‘French solution’ whereby Germany would remain in NATO’s political alliance but not in its integrated military structure. Kohl also ruminated about the implications of a German withdrawal from NATO in a meeting with President Bush in Washington on 8 June, 1990. I quote from the official German transcript of the meeting:  

A German exit out of NATO would create an unstable situation in Europe … France and Great Britain might join together as the European nuclear forces and create an ‘Entente Cordiale’ … [N]on nuclear European states … would stand alone in terms of security concerns. This type of constellation – a neutral Germany, two European nuclear powers, and other non-nuclear states – would not only have negative consequences for the EC, but also for political integration. It would not take Germany more than ten years before there would be a discussion of why they do not have nuclear weapons. This alone would be catastrophic.  

What of the EC in this scenario? We can imagine that economic motivations would have kept Germany in the Community, but with decidedly less enthusiasm and with no Franco-German ‘engine’ – meaning no political union, perhaps no EMU, and probably no eastern enlargement. (On this
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Today the top priority for American foreign policy in Europe should be the fate of the Federal Republic of Germany. Even if we make strides in overcoming the division of Europe ... we cannot have a vision for Europe's future that does not include an approach to 'the German question'.

When Bush, speaking in Mainz, Germany, at the end of May, called for the United States and Germany to become 'partners in leadership', the prospect of German unification was already embedded in our strategy. In the background of our thinking was the judgement that the old bipolar order was fast breaking down. The European allies had long since stepped out from under the shadow of superpower domination in the west and were poised to do so in the east as well. Poland and Hungary were on the brink of major change, pushed from below by democratic opposition forces and facilitated from outside by the advent of a reformist Soviet leader who seemed predisposed to allowing the east Europeans to find their own solutions.

For policy makers in Washington, the April 1989 Polish Roundtable Agreement, which called for freely contested national elections, was the mobilizing event. It was apparent to us then that the Roundtable Agreement, if fully implemented, was the beginning of the end of communist rule in Poland. And if communism was finished in Poland, it was finished everywhere in eastern Europe, including East Germany, which in turn meant that German unification had just leapt onto the international agenda. These, of course, were very large 'ifs'; Washington's appreciation of the potential for such sweeping change was by no means a prediction that it would actually occur, much less that it could occur in a matter of months. Yet the potentialities inherent in these events underscored how much was at stake and how critical the US role would be.

While the countries of eastern Europe increasingly were going their own ways, the European Community was embarking on a bold new drive for unity, heralded in the Single European Act of 1986. At the very time of the Polish Roundtable Agreement in April 1989, a committee chaired by European Commission President Jacques Delors issued its report calling for a three-stage approach to Economic and Monetary Union. This approach, facilitated by publication of the Cecchini Report on 'the costs of non-Europe' and by Thatcher's surprising (and later lamented) acceptance of the move toward EMU at the EC's special summit in Brussels in February, was formally adopted at the Madrid session of the European Council in June. Thus, thinking in Washington in early 1989 was influenced by the prospect of impending major change in both east and west Europe.

Additionally, a new set of Soviet foreign policy initiatives under Gorbachev, most notably his December 1988 announcement before the UN General Assembly of dramatic unilateral force reductions, had ushered in

The United States and German unification

So much for 'what ifs'. My argument is not that the United States caused German unification or that the revolutionary year of 1989 would have been unimaginable without US leadership. Nor do I discount the role of Europeans in the self-liberation of the continent. Indeed, I give pride of place to the Poles in this process. The Berlin Wall would not have fallen in November 1989 but for the successful challenge to communist rule in Poland earlier that year, and there were a dozen instances where Poland’s peaceful revolution might have broken down. Rather, my argument is that the United States played an important facilitative role by throwing its weight fully behind the processes of peaceful democratic change in east central Europe, and that the US role in German unification was decisive in ensuring that it came out right - with Germany enjoying full sovereignty from the moment of unification, with its EC and NATO affiliations intact, and with all of Europe accepting and even welcoming this outcome.

Having written about this period in some detail already, let me focus selectively on a few areas that have been the subject of debate in some of the new scholarship. First, we saw unification coming, sooner than the Germans themselves, and so had considered our approaches within a broader strategic review. In March 1989, long before the fall of the Berlin Wall, a closely held National Security Council memorandum to President Bush put Germany at centre stage:

last point, a 1994 CDU/CSU White Paper warned that the EC’s failure to stabilize east central Europe would leave Germany ‘once again caught in the middle between East and West … tempted by its own security constraints to try to effect the stabilization.’

Further, under the highly conflicted unification scenario I have described, the Germans would have little incentive to resolve the border issue with Poland. With everything still unsettled, they would have figured it was better to leave this for future generations to resolve. This would have excited revanchist dreams amongst the expellee communities in Bavaria and fuelled nationalist paranoia in Poland. Instead of an historic rapprochement, German-Polish relations might have been strained to the breaking point. The Poles, in this climate, would have been in no mood to mend fences with Lithuania and their other eastern neighbours. Borders in east central Europe (none of which predate the First World War) would have been seen to be open to revision. The post-communist transitions in this region would have been overwhelmed by ultra-nationalism. The Soviet Union might or might not have disintegrated in this scenario. Either way, leaders in Moscow would have looked west and seen unfinished business in east central Europe. The Cold War division of Europe would have been only partly overcome; the entire continent would have been ‘renationalized’. Europe would have been not quite whole, not quite free.

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Having written about this period in some detail already, let me focus selectively on a few areas that have been the subject of debate in some of the new scholarship. First, we saw unification coming, sooner than the Germans themselves, and so had considered our approaches within a broader strategic review. In March 1989, long before the fall of the Berlin Wall, a closely held National Security Council memorandum to President Bush put Germany at centre stage:

last point, a 1994 CDU/CSU White Paper warned that the EC’s failure to stabilize east central Europe would leave Germany ‘once again caught in the middle between East and West … tempted by its own security constraints to try to effect the stabilization.’

Further, under the highly conflicted unification scenario I have described, the Germans would have little incentive to resolve the border issue with Poland. With everything still unsettled, they would have figured it was better to leave this for future generations to resolve. This would have excited revanchist dreams amongst the expellee communities in Bavaria and fuelled nationalist paranoia in Poland. Instead of an historic rapprochement, German-Polish relations might have been strained to the breaking point. The Poles, in this climate, would have been in no mood to mend fences with Lithuania and their other eastern neighbours. Borders in east central Europe (none of which predate the First World War) would have been seen to be open to revision. The post-communist transitions in this region would have been overwhelmed by ultra-nationalism. The Soviet Union might or might not have disintegrated in this scenario. Either way, leaders in Moscow would have looked west and seen unfinished business in east central Europe. The Cold War division of Europe would have been only partly overcome; the entire continent would have been ‘renationalized’. Europe would have been not quite whole, not quite free.
a more fluid east-west environment that yielded new opportunities for intra-European engagement. Germany, of course, was pivotal in all these respects. Just as it was at the beginning of the Cold War, the struggle over the future of Germany was also a struggle over the future of Europe and the future of the transatlantic relationship.

When the Wall fell, the US Administration was already prepared to lend its strong support to German unification, while the Soviet, British and French leaders declared the unification was ‘not on the agenda’ and sought to convene meetings of the four wartime powers to exercise control over the process. Chancellor Kohl’s ‘ten-point’ speech of 28 November, aimed at creating a framework for rapprochement between the two Germanys, evoked sharp rebukes from Moscow, London and Paris.

At the time, we in the US Administration knew very well of the antipathy of the British and French, to say nothing of the Soviets, toward unification and suspected that they would seek to derail or at least postpone the process. Although some scholars have tried to challenge this interpretation, new archival evidence reveals an alarming degree of anti-unification collusion among British, French and Soviet leaders in this early period.14 Visiting Moscow in late September, Thatcher told Gorbachev: ‘Britain and Western Europe are not interested in the unification of Germany. The words written in the NATO communiqué may sound different, but disregard them.’ In her memoirs, Thatcher recounted two meetings with Mitterrand at the EC Summit in Strasbourg in December, in which she proposed creating an ‘Anglo-French axis’ to ‘check the German juggernaut’.16

Gorbachev and Mitterrand compared notes a few days after the opening of the Berlin Wall. The words were careful but the meaning unmistakable. Gorbachev, alluding to a prior discussion with Mitterrand on the ‘problem’ of unification, stressed that ‘as far as I understand, we have a mutual understanding of this really cardinal issue.’ Without specifically agreeing, Mitterrand responded that he had felt it ‘necessary to contact you again to hear confirmation directly from you…. There is a certain equilibrium that exists in Europe, and we should not disturb it.’ A month later, in their meeting in Kiev, Mitterrand told Gorbachev:

We should not change the order of the processes. First and foremost among them should be the European integration, the evolution of Eastern Europe, and the all-European process … Kohl’s … ten points have turned everything around. He mixed all the factors together, he is rushing.18

Some scholars have observed that nothing much tangible came of these efforts. Gorbachev, Thatcher and Mitterrand grumbled and commiserated with one another, but never mounted a combined set of policies in opposition to unification.19 This is true as far as it goes, but it begs the question how far it might have gone had the United States not actively sought to neutralize first British and French, then Soviet, obstructionism. What if President Bush had joined the others in a combined Four Power effort to oppose, delay, restrict or ‘supervise’ (to use Mitterrand’s term) the process? What if we had merely sat on the sidelines, leaving this for the West Germans to manage alone?

New archival evidence makes it clear that whatever French intentions may have been, Gorbachev believed that France and Britain were with him and acted, in the critical period immediately following the fall of the Wall, on the basis of a perceived anti-unification coalition.20 It is also clear that Chancellor Kohl feared such a coalition and felt that France had tried to ‘play the Russian card’.21 For his part, President Bush, after meeting with Mitterrand on Saint Martin in mid-December, came away with the impression that ‘in contrast to the efforts within the French bureaucracy, [Mitterrand] was resigned to eventual German unification’ but ‘cautioned against events in Germany moving too fast’.22

The totality of the evidence suggests that Mitterrand and especially foreign ministry officials at the Quai d’Orsay were caught unprepared and reacted instinctively and clumsily to the prospect of German unification, but that by January of 1990 Mitterrand had come to realize that unification was coming and so would not jeopardize French–German relations in the vain effort to stop it. He therefore sought to work with the Germans to gain certain assurances about the European integration process, in the end securing French interests rather well. Similarly, as Patrick Salmon has ably documented, Thatcher’s personal antipathy to unification was never translated into effective opposition to unification on the part of her diplomats.23

At the EC’s Paris Summit on 18 November, Mitterrand and other European leaders were at pains to relegate German unification to the distant and indefinite future. From the American and German perspectives, such French tactics – which included Mitterrand’s suggestion that he and Gorbachev pay a joint visit to East Germany in December24 – risked reinforcing Soviet hopes that the unification process could be derailed altogether. Similarly, the comment of a French official at a 10 December meeting of Four Power ambassadors in Berlin – that ‘the purpose was to remind the Germans who is in charge of Berlin’25 – played into Soviet efforts to invoke Four Power prerogatives over Germany’s future. Thus the American role in neutralizing British and French resistance in this early period, and holding off Four Power involvement, was critical to overcoming Soviet opposition.

Immediately after Kohl’s ten-point speech, Secretary of State James Baker, after meeting with Bush in the White House, laid out ‘four principles’ that the President would present to Gorbachev in their upcoming (1–2 December) meeting off the coast of Malta and at a NATO summit in Brussels immediately thereafter: ‘self-determination should be pursued
without prejudice to its outcome' and should be a 'peaceful, gradual ... step-by-step process'; if unification should come, it should occur 'within the context of Germany's continuing alignment with NATO and an increasingly integrated European Community' and should respect 'the inviolability of existing borders'. These principles, endorsed almost verbatim by the NATO Summit in Brussels on December, were also meant to help set the agenda for the EC Summit held five days later in Strasbourg, where a similar set of principles was adopted. Whether EC leaders might have rallied around these principles on their own is debatable, but it is clear that US leadership on this issue greatly strengthened Kohl's hand in his difficult negotiations at Strasbourg, where Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti supported Thatcher in her famous assault on Kohl.

US leadership was similarly critical in securing Soviet acceptance of united Germany's remaining in the western alliance system. As Bush put it in a letter to Kohl on the eve of the latter's trip to Moscow for a crucial meeting with Gorbachev in early February 1990, 'In no event will we allow the Soviet Union ... to try to force you to create the kind of Germany Moscow might want, at the pace Moscow might prefer.' By this time, and certainly after the East German elections in mid-March, the question was not whether German unification could be achieved but what kind of Germany would emerge from the process, and with what implications for the future of Europe and the transatlantic link. Would united Germany remain in NATO? Would it enjoy full sovereignty from the moment of unification? If not, what would this mean for the future of Europe?

It was important, then, that negotiations undertaken via the Two-Plus-Four process (the two German states plus the four wartime allies) did not become a venue for debate over the alliance relationships of a future united Germany. At the first meeting of the Two-Plus-Four, Baker reitered the US view of its scope:

The primary purpose of the Two-Plus-Four process is to facilitate the unity of the two Germanys. The timing and form of unification are internal issues to be decided by the Germans themselves. A final settlement under international law should terminate four-power rights and responsibilities in an expeditious, straightforward, and legally binding way.

Immediately after the meeting, Baker cabled Genscher to express his concern about the Soviet suggestion that Four-Power rights should continue even after unification:

This delinkage could lead to an ongoing singularization of Germany and a period, of uncertain duration, during which Germany's sovereignty would remain infringed. There is no reason, 45 years after World War II, to retain Four Power rights over a unified, democratic Germany.

When Baker met with Gorbachev in Moscow in mid-May, the Soviet leader continued to maintain that 'a unified Germany in NATO was impossible for them'. Baker's cable back to Bush that night described a 'long and at times difficult day' but also noted that Gorbachev had no answer to Baker's reminder that according to the Helsinki Final Act, all states have the right freely to join or leave alliances. It was a point that President Bush picked up on two weeks later during the Washington Summit with Gorbachev, winning Soviet agreement for including a statement to that effect in the official communique. The 'Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance', issued at NATO's London Summit in early July, helped secure Soviet consent. Thereafter, intense German–Soviet negotiations led to the breakthrough agreement in the Caucasus in mid-July. Back in Washington, we privately called it 'V-E Day II', signifying the belated liberation of the continent, nearly half a century after the Allied victory in Europe in 1945.

A certain conception of Europe

The very speed of the process facilitated Soviet acquiescence, in that we and the West Germans could present Moscow with a series of facts accomplished that it found increasingly difficult to oppose. However, it also meant that the post-unification, post-Cold War security order in Europe had to be built during a period of rapid and disorienting flux. In the process, American conceptions of a 'New Atlanticism', intended to reconcile the twin goals of European integration and a US-led transatlantic security order, increasingly collided with European efforts to build a more cohesive and assertive European Union within a 'post-Yalta' economic and political community.

Our ultimate strategic goal was the unification not just of Germany but of Europe as a whole, and the two processes had long been linked in American thinking. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the United States had lent strong support to the goal of European unity. John Foster Dulles had been secretary of the 'American Committee for a United States of Europe' before he became Secretary of State, and Marshall Plan aid explicitly required European coordination via the Organization for European Economic Cooperation and so created a framework for the future European Economic Community. Before the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, President Eisenhower remarked that this would be 'one of the finest days in the history of the free world, perhaps even more so than winning the war'.

Of course, even in these early days and certainly later, American attitudes about European unity were ambivalent. On the one hand, we wanted a more united and capable Europe and knew in any case that American policy had to take into account the reality of a more assertive EC. On the other, we did not always like the kind of EC that seemed to be
emerging and so adopted policies that seemed to oppose the Community at every turn. It was not that American attitudes toward European integration were duplicitous – that would be too facile an historical judgment – but that the two strands of thinking were equally strong and frequently in conflict.

It is a fair judgement, as Geir Lundestad has argued, that while the Bush Administration was more supportive of European integration than any of its recent predecessors, it nonetheless saw a more united Europe operating within an American-led Atlantic framework. In post-unification Europe, absent a common external threat, the question was posed starkly: was the ambition of European Union compatible with a continued strong transatlantic link?

Baker’s ‘New Atlanticism’ idea, detailed in his two Berlin speeches of December 1989 and June 1991, tried to bridge the gap by proposing a system of interlocking institutions. The hope, as expressed in President Bush’s speech in Prague in November 1990, was that the end of the Cold War would create the conditions not only for a continued transatlantic relationship but a stronger and more natural one, freed from the unnatural imbalance of roles and responsibilities that the Cold War had imposed.  

Our overarching perspective, at least for the immediate post-Cold War period, was that the United States had to remain in Europe to balance Russian power and provide stability so that a more united western Europe could extend its zone of democratic stability eastward. This meant that NATO had to survive as the key institutional link binding the United States to Europe; its survival, in turn, called for its radical transformation, with a new balance of European and American roles and responsibilities.

The United States also needed to embrace European unity, including the effort to create a common European foreign and security policy, while also maintaining the vitality of transatlantic security – two competing tasks that proved hard to reconcile.

On the positive side of the ledger, the US readily supported Delors’ proposal, seconded by Kohl, for putting the European Commission in the lead role in coordinating G-24 assistance to central and eastern Europe, a job that the Commission performed admirably. With the strong support of the Germans, we also obligated the first ever US–EC Declaration of Principles, designed to put relations on a more regular footing. Inauspiciously, however, the document was published at the Paris Summit of November 1990; just as US–EC negotiations in the Uruguay Round trade talks hit an impasse.

In debates over the ‘new European architecture’, Baker’s ‘New Atlanticism’ increasingly collided with ‘Europeanist’ visions of a post-Yalta security order. European integrationist efforts accelerated in early 1990, as the French sought to lock in German commitment to deeper European integration before unification was consummated. In April, just before the Dublin EC Summit, Kohl and Mitterrand sent a joint letter to the President of the European Council calling for the need to accelerate progress toward economic and monetary union as well as ‘to transform [political] relations … among the member states into a European Union’. Spurred by this Franco-German initiative, the Dublin Summit duly focused on preparations for an intergovernmental conference on EMU, and a second summit in late June (‘Dublin II’) endorsed a parallel IGC on European political union, with its agenda left deliberately vague so as to secure Thatcher’s consent.

US attitudes toward these developments were ambivalent. We welcomed in principle the move toward closer unity, which was in any case for EC members, not us, to decide. However, we worried that setting the ambitious goal of political union – which went far beyond the real intention of most member governments, including the French! – risked bogging the EC down in protracted internal debates and shifting focus away from what we considered the priority task of integrating the new democracies of the east into western institutions (an agenda almost wholly missing from Dublin I and II). In the debate over ‘deepening’ versus ‘widening’, the United States came down on the side of the latter – not, as some suspected, to dilute the EC, but to ensure that the fledgling democracies of eastern Europe were not consigned to a kind of ‘no-man’s land’ (to use Vaclav Havel’s term) between a more cohesive west and a chaotic east.

As early as President Bush’s speech in Leiden in July 1989, following his visits to Poland and Hungary, the US had sought to extend the ‘Atlantic idea’ eastward. NATO’s London Summit of July 1990, in addition to helping condition the Soviet leaders to united Germany’s membership in NATO, also took the first steps toward integrating the eastern European countries into the alliance. This, we hoped, would make it easier for the European Community to open its doors to eastern enlargement by effectively resolving the eastern European security dilemma. Thus, the differences between widening and deepening were not so much about ultimate goals as about timing and sequence: whether tangible steps toward a ‘Europe whole and free’ should take precedence over EMU and EPU, or whether, as the French argued, eastern enlargement had to await the internal transformation of the Community.

More fundamental transatlantic differences emerged over French-led efforts to develop a European security and defence identity. In early December 1990 Mitterrand and Kohl circulated another letter to their EC counterparts proposing the Community’s eventual absorption of the Western European Union into the EC as its security and defence arm. This proposal, like the ‘Eurocorps’ idea floated shortly thereafter, seemed to herald a European security capacity operating outside the Alliance framework. President Bush broached our concerns directly at the NATO summit in Rome in November 1991:
The United States has been, is, and will remain an unhesitating proponent of the aim and process of European integration. This strong American support extends to the prospect of political union—as well as the goal of a defense identity... Even the attainment of European union, however, will not diminish the need for NATO... We support the development of the WEU because it can complement the alliance and strengthen the European role in it... But we do not see the WEU as a European alternative to the alliance.\textsuperscript{37}

Transatlantic differences were papered over at Rome and at the EC's Maastricht Summit the following month, but the underlying conflict was left unresolved. It was an inauspicious way to usher in a post-Cold War order. Our NATO-centric approach might have been feasible had we been prepared to undertake the kind of fundamental restructuring of the Alliance that some in Paris were urging on us. But we could not have it both ways—preserving a level of American dominance that was anathema to the French (and others) while also insisting that any European effort be made within the Alliance framework. The French position was in many ways the mirror image of ours.\textsuperscript{38} The French wanted a separate European security capacity but systematically undermined efforts to transform NATO in ways that might have made that ambition feasible. In the end, no amount of 'architectural' creativity could overcome the inherent contradictions between the two approaches.

A new transatlantic partnership?

Jacques Attali, Mitterrand's security adviser during the period, later recounted a conversation in September 1992 with US national security adviser Brent Scowcroft in which General Scowcroft told him that 'one of the explicit projects' of President [George H.W.] Bush's second term was to have been a 'Euro-Atlantic Union'.\textsuperscript{39} Indeed, establishing a new transatlantic partnership—one that recognized, encouraged, and accommodated a more united Europe—would have been a central focus of US policy had Bush been re-elected.

Would the effort have succeeded? Certainly, US-European relations would have been accorded a primacy under a second Bush term that was lacking under President Clinton, so transatlantic relations probably would have fared better in the mid-1990s. Yet Attali's judgment that 'Euro-Atlanticism serves as camouflage for US domination of Europe'\textsuperscript{40} was telling, for the underlying contradictions between the Europeanist and Atlanticist conceptions of Europe's future would have persisted and indeed grown more acute no matter who inhabited the Oval Office. Moreover, there were structural reasons militating against such a transformation—above all, the demise of the bipolar international system and the growing disparities between US and European military capacity and strategic priorities.

Thus, to flash forward a decade, the breakdown of transatlantic consensus over Iraq beginning in 2002 was not only a consequence of policies and personalities but a manifestation of a longer term and probably inevitable erosion of transatlantic solidarity. These changes were building up throughout the 1990s, but they were largely obscured by the sugar-coated rhetoric of NATO communiqués. Iraq simply brought them into full view. If the breakdown had not occurred over Iraq, it would have occurred over something else.

The task now is to fashion a new transatlantic relationship on the basis of today's realities and tomorrow's challenges, rather than out of a nostalgic effort to recreate the alliance of a bygone era. If anything good comes out of the crisis over Iraq, it may be that this dispute will catalyze a more honest and realistic debate about the future of transatlantic relations. Perhaps now that we are liberated from the excessive expectations of the immediate post-Cold War period, such a transatlantic debate can produce, over time, a new and durable consensus around the values and interests we continue to share despite current political differences.

Notes

2 Many of these new accounts are cited below as well as represented elsewhere in this volume. For an earlier overview, see Spohr (2000, pp. 869–888).
4 See Michael Cox, Chapter 1, this volume.
6 Kusters and Hoffmann (1998, doc. #305).
7 See, for example, Hutchings, 'Europe between the Superpowers'. In Skinner (2007).
8 Hutchings (1997).
10 Kohl, by contrast, had said as late as 1988 that he did not expect to see German unification in his lifetime. See Stent (1990–1, p. 60).
11 Hutchings (1997, p. 9). Outside of government, William Hyland had come to a similar judgment:

If there is some kind of new order in Hungary, Poland, and perhaps Czechoslovakia, with less of a Soviet presence... then the question is whether that can be applied to East Germany. And if it is, aren't you just a step or so away from the unification of Germany...?


12 For a condensed version, see Cecchini (1988).
13 See, e.g., Bozo (2005) and Schabert (2002).
Part IV

German unification

Seizing the opportunity