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The Transformation of the German Question
since 1945, Updated Edition

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To Akira Iriye
friend and teacher

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bridges to East Germany and “normalizing” relations. Even former hard-liners such as Bavarian party chief Strauss, who earlier had tried to have the Basic Treaty declared unconstitutional, now promoted giving large credits to the DDR, without expecting, or receiving, much in return from West Germany’s grasping sibling in the East. With both major parties now in accord, German politics seemed to confirm that the diplomatic odyssey that had begun in 1945 was finally at an end.

Although this closer relationship between the two Germanys would provoke renewed doubts about German fidelity to the Western alliance, these were offset by a variety of factors. For one thing, Kohl and Genscher took care to affirm on every possible occasion the Federal Republic’s commitment to continuing integration within the European community. Also conducive to ironing out tensions was a good relationship between Ronald Reagan and Kohl, whom Reagan found to be “entirely different than his predecessor, very warm and outgoing.”³⁷ Although the U.S. and German positions on economic issues remained at odds, the president’s chief of staff thought that “the warm spot the President developed in his heart for Kohl had something to do with the fact that the Germans stopped nagging him about taxes and interest rates after the Christian Democrats regained power.”³⁸

Above all, the dynamics of the situation seemed to favor stability. By comparison with the prima donna Schmidt, Kohl came off as something of a political wallflower. He possessed, in British prime minister Margaret Thatcher’s condescending recollection, “the sure touch of a German provincial politician.”³⁹ Clearly a homebody in comparison with his cosmopolitan predecessor, Kohl spoke no English and seemed content to tend his own political garden. Under his care, the issue of reunification seemed finally ready to enter a long period of dormancy. Yet it was into his hands that history thrust the long-awaited opportunity for reunification.

chapter 7

ONE GERMANY, ONE WORLD

During the 1980s, the U.S.-German relationship took contradictory forms. The same differences over cold war policy that had soured relations in the past continued to provoke family spats and brought renewed fears of an imminent breakup. But despite worrisome indications of a trend toward neutralism and nationalism, the West Germans continued their process of cultural modernization and their institutional integration into the larger Western civilization, while their East German cousins, it later became evident, looked on enviously. And while West Germans had become quite weary of the cold war and its incessant demands, they proved quite ready to push for unification on wholly Western terms when the opportunity unexpectedly arose at the decade’s end.

Tensions surrounding the modernization of NATO’s missiles in Europe carried over into the 1980s and set the stage for a decade-long reemergence of U.S. concern for German fidelity. In an attempt to steal a propaganda march on the Soviets, the Reagan administration proposed in November 1981 a rather implausible “zero-zero” deal in which the Soviets were supposed to remove all their intermediate-range missiles in return for an American promise not to modernize NATO’s intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF). The Soviets, however, were not interested in giving up something for nothing and claimed in addition that this arrangement would leave them exposed to French and British missiles, which were not covered by the terms of the bargain.

The Reagan administration’s get-tough public relations ploy may have played well in Peoria, but it would not do for Düsseldorf. Reagan faced a shifting political situation in West Germany that was most visible in the sur-

prising increase in strength of the so-called Green Party. Reminiscent of the youth movement in the United States in the 1960s, the Greens were less a party in the traditional sense than a spontaneous burst of unfocused political energy. The Greens were a multicolored collage (calling them a coalition would suggest a degree of discipline they did not at first possess) of environmentalists whose opposition to atomic energy plants and the growth dynamic of modern industrial society would have made Henry Morgenthau jump for joy. "Nuclear Power—No Thanks," said the bumper stickers on the jalopies favored by many of these young rebels. In addition, they counted among their number pacifists, food faddists, anarchists, new leftists, lesbians and feminists, and what-not.

The Greens' potential for political growth was limited by their near-anarchic opposition to leadership, organization, and anything approaching party discipline. As a political party, they were even ambivalent about holding power. Moreover their protest against INF was based on apocalyptic expectations, which are notoriously short-lived and incapable of generating sustained interest. Nevertheless, because their nuclear views did have widespread resonance, the Greens managed to coalesce in opposition to emplacement of the missiles and launch a dramatic series of street demonstrations. Surprisingly, too, the Greens managed to capture nearly 6 percent of the vote in the 1983 elections, which made it possible for them to take their lively and irreverent opposition into the Bundestag chamber, where their colorful and unconventional political style attracted further notice to their cause.

The INF crisis came to a head following the national elections of 1983, in which the Christian Democrats returned to power under the leadership of Helmut Kohl. No longer burdened with the responsibility of governing, the Social Democrats became openly hostile to the installation of the missiles. As the date for their emplacement approached, the tempo of protests increased, not only in Germany but throughout Western Europe. At the same time, the Soviets began to increase the diplomatic pressure by attempting, rather heavy-handedly, to capitalize on the unrest in the Federal Republic by threatening a new "Ice Age" in Soviet-German relations. With the failure of U.S.-Soviet negotiators to reach an accord, the Christian Democratic majority in the Bundestag approved missile deployment in November 1983, but only after Kohl had "fought the battle of his political life."¹ Shortly thereafter, the thunderstorm of antimissile protests abated as quickly as it had arisen.

Though the immediate crisis had been weathered, it was generally understood that these political tempests were symptomatic of a deeper change in the country's political climate—a generational change. Despite the fascinating rise of the Greens, more important was a growing radicalization within Social Democratic ranks. The left wing of the SPD had become increasingly

restive under Helmut Schmidt's conservative leadership, but by 1983 his moderating hand was no longer at the tiller. Following his departure, the party, the wind of *Ostpolitik* having been stolen from its sails by its conservative rivals, tacked even further left in advocating closer ties with the DDR that would promote a "common security."

With the conservatives now locked into pursuing close relations with the DDR and the Social Democrats once again questioning the Western security connection, the result was a palpable "drifting apart intellectually and emotionally" of Germany and the U.S.² A strident anti-Americanism and a radical anticapitalist mentality among German critics of the United States meant that their desire to get out from under the thumb of the superpower was not matched by a corresponding critique of Soviet responsibility for Germany's predicament. The upshot was a worrisome growth of neutralist sentiment as Germans searched for a *Sonderweg*, or third path, between East and West that might somehow bridge the differences between the two superpowers and restore Germany to herself. The most worrisome possibility, recalled Secretary of State Alexander Haig, was that the German consensus on membership in NATO now seemed "in danger of disintegration."³

Although such developments triggered the usual nervous reactions among outsiders, in contrast to the aggressive nationalism of the past, this variety was explicitly antimilitarist in its sentiments.⁴ Indeed there is some question as to how nationalist it really was. In its preoccupation with Germany, the United States often overlooked the fact that criticism of NATO was even stronger in other important European nations, on the left in Britain for example, and that Americans did not get overly excited about those cases. Moreover, survey after survey showed that public opinion in the Federal Republic was increasingly comfortable with a West German identity and continued to favor the existing, moderate course of policy. Despite many signs that it was in a transitional period, then, Germany was not yet on the threshold of a new geopolitical era.

It soon became clear that despite the superior airs of its young radicals, it was not on the verge of entering a new moral epoch, either. Even though a new generation had come of age in Germany, and though there was justice in the contention that children should not suffer for the sins of their fathers, many Americans and their Allies, however charitably inclined, could not erase the memories of World War II. French president François Mitterrand's refusal to permit the Germans to participate in ceremonies commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy suggested the continuing potency of sentiments that were too disturbing to be openly expressed. Partly to mollify Kohl for this snub, Reagan agreed to the chancellor's pleas that he visit a German military cemetery in Bitburg the following year. Following Reagan's commitment to the visit, the press revealed that forty-nine members of the Waffen SS were also buried there, whereupon a

powerful geyser of anti-German sentiment erupted. Spurred only in part by the predictable outrage of American Jewish groups, majorities in both the U.S. House and Senate petitioned Reagan not to go.

Reagan revealed in his memoirs that he "didn't think it was right to keep on punishing every German for the Holocaust, including Germans not yet born in the time of Hitler."⁵ However, his critics believed the president was confusing forgiveness with forgetfulness. Editors of the *Washington Post* wrote that "Nazi Germany was not, as Mr. Reagan seemed to suggest, the handiwork of 'one man' and his regime or even hundreds of thousands. It remains, in the recollection and understanding of those who dare to recollect and understand, a terrifying—and endlessly instructive—monument to what can happen when a people, for the most part, let it happen."⁶ White House suggestions that the SS troops had also been victims of Nazism triggered yet more howls of outrage from a journalistic wolf pack now in full pursuit of the president. Despite considerable pressure from his image-conscious retinue, not to mention the even more formidable suasion of his strong-willed wife, Nancy, Reagan refused to back down. He visited both the Bitburg cemetery and the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen, and the controversy finally blew itself out in the kind of sentimental photo opportunity at which this actor-turned-president excelled.

It may well be that this episode marked a watershed in the transition from attributions of collective guilt to a more impersonal historical memory of crimes against humanity. Indeed by this time the Germans themselves, many of whom possessed unquestionably pro-Western and democratic credentials, were coming to feel that enough was enough. Kohl suggested as much when he stated that the Germans could not be expected to engage in endless breast-beating and self-abasement. Responding rhetorically to the question of what the Germans wanted, he said: "What do they want? They want to live in peace. They want to live in freedom. They want social justice. They want a good livelihood. They want to find happiness in life. They want to be glad. They don't want to walk around stressed, confronted from morning till evening with the burden of history. There are however people who want to persuade us that we should not be allowed to do this."⁷

Young people in Germany, raised in a democratic climate and well aware of the past, were increasingly impatient with suggestions that some collective taint had been passed down to them, as if cultural transmission somehow obeyed the laws of heredity. "No feeling person expects them to wear a hair shirt merely because they are Germans," said an understanding President Richard von Weizsäcker.⁸

In any case, it was not so clear whether the protests about Bitburg in the United States and elsewhere had been about continuing defects in German culture or whether they had been prompted by a problem that gnawed at non-German consciences. In trying to wrestle with the distinction between forgiving and forgetting, many apparently feared the encroachment of a cul-

tural version of Alzheimer's disease—a forgetfulness that would erode the ethical power rooted in memory. As Kohl's controversial attempt to reintroduce the word *Vaterland* into German political discourse demonstrated, one could not unilaterally put an expiration date on the historical sensibilities of others. For the West, the Bitburg episode demonstrated the uneasy relationship between the political necessity of mollifying the Germans and the moral imperative of not forgetting.

All of this suggests that the revival in the 1980s of Western concern over the German national character was misplaced. To be sure, the noisy and attention-getting *Historikerstreit*, in which a number of revisionist historians were taken to task for engaging in some disturbing rationalizations of the behavior of the Nazi regime, suggested that some Germans were still bent on beautifying an ugly past. But foreign concern over the reemergence of essential antidemocratic traits was misplaced. If culture is learned behavior, then the West Germans' successful transition to democracy—an achievement that only a few were willing to dispute—could only mean that nondemocratic singularities had been correspondingly unlearned.

As a case in point, the fear of German nationalism and neutralism was continuously evaluated from a cold war standpoint, in which the past was the basis for judging contemporaneous German behavior. But it may be that the German outlook emerging in the 1980s was more an anticipation of a post-cold war sensibility than it was a recrudescence of old attitudes that no longer possessed cultural resonance. There was indeed a real dissatisfaction with the status quo in Europe and Germany, but this was only the manifestation of a deeper unhappiness at the running down of the cold war's once optimistic historical imagination and the absence of any plausible diplomatic alternatives. And despite the compulsive conjuring up of old bogeys, one senses that American statesmen realized the German cultural question had changed beyond recognition. If one is to judge by the memoirs of those in the government, the few, brief mentions of German matters in their otherwise voluminous recollections suggest that the German problem did not cause any sleepless nights in Washington.

Just as the old ideological wells ran dry, new ideas began to bubble up. The turning point in the cold war came with Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in Moscow in March 1985. Faced with a situation in which the USSR was fast losing ground in its economic competition with the West and armed with a growing understanding that the rigid orthodoxies of Marxism no longer commanded unquestioning faith, the new Soviet leadership launched a program of deep reform. The restructuring that came with perestroika and the openness of glasnost, while not intended to do away with communism, at least promised to make the Soviet Union a far more open society.

This new ideology had the potential to cross Soviet borders and carry with it the possibilities for new forms of international life. If the Soviet system were to be restored to health, Gorbachev realized that the bloated

Soviet military establishment, which by some estimates consumed about one quarter of the USSR's GNP annually, would have to be put on a crash diet. This would in turn release capital resources for investment in the emaciated Soviet civilian economy. But military downsizing was impossible without first eliminating the rationale for maintaining a huge defense establishment. An essential part of his program for curbing the military's appetite, therefore, would be to negotiate disarmament agreements. The shrinking of strategic nuclear forces loomed large on Gorbachev's agenda, and so did conventional force reductions in Europe. But all this presupposed a radical restructuring of the USSR's alliance systems, which consumed so much capital.

After Gorbachev finally agreed to sever any linkage between the INF and strategic issues, especially Reagan's so-called Star Wars antimissile defense program, the moribund INF negotiations resumed in 1987 and made rapid progress thereafter. But no sooner was the INF treaty signed on 6 December 1987 than it became clear that the Federal Republic would continue to bear more than its fair share of the alliance's atomic risk. Although the intermediate-range missiles were being removed, more than enough short-range missiles remained on both sides to make a nuclear wasteland of the country in the event of war.

Employing the same logic that earlier had prompted NATO's INF initiative, Kohl now argued that the short-range launchers also needed to be eliminated. At an economic summit in Venice, however, Great Britain's Margaret Thatcher insisted that their removal would effectively rob NATO, long dependent for its credibility on a nuclear strategy, of whatever deterrent force it still possessed. The result was a replay in miniature of the 1978 decisions: a determination by NATO to modernize its short-range Lance missiles, accompanied by all the familiar objections from within West Germany to overnuclearization.

This caused some American diplomats to worry that the West Germans were softening toward the Soviets. Thanks in large measure to the widespread realization that the road leading to the end of the cold war ran through Moscow, Gorbachev was enormously popular in Germany. Outbreaks of "Gorbymania" were not unknown in the United States, too, but in the Federal Republic it was clear that the new Soviet leader was far more popular than Ronald Reagan. This situation was dangerous, for if the new magician from Moscow succeeded in enchanting the Germans, Gorbachev might achieve his goals in central Europe by unraveling the Western security system.

Upstaged for one of the few times in his career as actor-politician, Reagan attempted to recapture the limelight by visiting Berlin in June 1987. Warning that the Soviets might be seeking to "raise false hopes in the West, or to strengthen the Soviet system without changing it," Reagan issued a challenge to his Soviet counterpart. "If you seek peace," he declaimed, "tear

down this wall!" The challenge was at this point rhetorical, but it made clear that the Soviets could not expect to get something for nothing in Germany. Little did both sides realize that within the space of a few years, not only the wall but also the cold war's ideological barriers would be dismantled.

Despite Reagan's best efforts, the propaganda advantage continued to shift in favor of the Soviets. Gorbachev's book, *Perestroika*, published in 1987, remained on the German best-seller lists for months. In December 1988, the Soviet leader unilaterally announced significant conventional force reductions. In January 1990, in a notable speech to the United Nations General Assembly, he reiterated one of the book's themes: "freedom of choice" for nations. All of this was eagerly absorbed by an admiring German public. During his visit to the Federal Republic in June 1989, he was greeted in the streets by delirious shouts of "Gorby! Gorby!" "He could be an American . . . the way he does public relations," said one impressed student. Tantalizingly, the Soviet leader suggested that the Berlin wall was not permanent, saying that "the wall can disappear when those conditions that created it fall away." Thoroughly captivated by the Gorbachev mystique, one German newspaper went so far as to declare, "The Russian bear has become a cuddly animal without bloody paws."⁹

Khrushchev in his time had said much the same thing, but there was no mistaking the expectation that Gorbachev was bent on really changing the underlying conditions. Clearly this outpouring of adulation, not unlike that received by Kennedy in the 1960s, was the product of a deep psychological need for change among large segments of the German population. A poll taken in late 1988 found that 75 percent of West Germans no longer believed in a Communist threat from the East. More than 80 percent believed Gorbachev was acting in good faith.¹⁰ The years had taken their toll. Weary of the endless NATO disputes over missile modernization that threatened to make Germany a nuclear battleground, and annoyed by the continued presence of foreign troops as de facto occupiers, the Germans wanted normalization. In Washington, influential figures in the foreign policy establishment, sensitive to these ominous developments, began to worry about the "Finlandization" of the Federal Republic, which the *New York Times* described as "geographically and psychologically vulnerable to the blandishments from the Communist East."¹¹

"West Germany is still reliable, but it is becoming increasingly less willing," said one administration source. *New York Times* columnist William Safire, a Cassandra on Germany throughout the decade, was quick to sniff out what he called Gorbachev's "scheme to subvert NATO with a Russo-German entente."¹² The belief that Germany was once again being wooed by the two superpowers appeared to be "heady stuff" for the Germans. Sensing a deep shift in attitudes, the *Times* pointed to the ominous implications of President Richard von Weizsäcker's remark: "We are not a great power. But we are also not a plaything for others."¹³

Although images of German neutralism once again began to dance in the heads of statesmen, German nationalism was no longer its driving force. In 1976, in the immediate afterglow of *Ostpolitik*, only 13 percent of West Germans had believed that reunification would be attained in their lifetime. In 1989, two-thirds of the German population still favored unification, but the numbers were beginning to go down. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s up to 50 percent of those polled had cited reunification as the central foreign policy task facing the Federal Republic, by the 1980s the figure had fallen to less than 10 percent. It was all the more ironic, then, that reunification would come at the moment in postwar history when people were least prepared for it.¹⁴

Significantly, only 37 percent of young people surveyed in 1989 said they desired reunification. One pollster predicted that "if a politician just sits and waits it won't be a problem in seven or eight years." Even Egon Bahr, the architect of *Ostpolitik*, said that "reunification is a strange item without any actual relevance." Most assumed that if a breakthrough were to occur, it would take the form of some kind of East German association with the European Community. West Germans had come to think of themselves as good Europeans, something that their politicians reiterated time and again. "Europe is our future," Kohl had said to the Bundestag in March 1987, and he had meant it.¹⁵

Thus as the 1980s came to a close, the graph of U.S.-German relations showed contradictory trend lines. On the one hand, there was undeniably a growing discontent within the Federal Republic with the endless demands of NATO and a corresponding weakening of the will to resist the siren song of neutrality. At the same time, however, a strong cosmopolitan commitment to Europe and the West had taken the nationalist steam out of the German identity crisis and reduced the pressure for reunification. Gorbymania or no, West German public opinion polls continued to show a strong commitment to the United States as the Federal Republic's closest friend. All of this suggested that changing sentiment within Germany was more the product of a reduced external threat than of an insatiable nationalist drive.

But still, change was in the air, and a new administration was on hand in Washington to greet it. Reagan's Republican successor, George Bush, was an experienced but colorless cold war apparatchik, having served as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, ambassador to China, and representative to the United Nations prior to signing on as Reagan's vice president. His aversion to flamboyance was made clear when he appointed as his secretary of state James Baker, a smooth, behind-the-scenes political operator. Heeding the president's instinct for "prudence," his administration tended instinctively to favor the status quo. However, with the USSR beginning to unravel, top officials realized that the effects on Germany might be swift and dramatic. In an attempt to blunt criticisms that he lacked vision, in May 1989 Bush spoke of moving "beyond containment" and of the need to look forward to a

"Europe whole and free." Inside the State Department, meanwhile, middle-level officials, anticipating further transformations in the Soviet Union, debated their implications for the German question.

While the eyes of all the experts were glued to the drama unfolding within the USSR, quite unexpectedly it was events within the DDR—which by all accounts had achieved extraordinary stabilization over the past fifteen years—that announced the coming drama of reunification. East German citizens were presumed by almost everyone to be the most passive and compliant in the Communist world, so it was all the more startling that they were the ones who kicked off the process that ended an era. The collapse of the DDR came at a time when the West Germans seemed fully reconciled, if not committed, to its survival.

The already close relationship between the two Germanys had deepened further with Erich Honecker's visit to the Federal Republic in September 1987. The visit had originally been scheduled for 1984, but Honecker had been forced to postpone it in the face of Soviet displeasure that the DDR had slipped her leash to go romping about with the Federal Republic. Finally, as the long-delayed INF accord on scrapping intermediate nuclear missiles in Europe at last came within sight, the Soviets allowed the 75-year-old Honecker to return to his homeland in the Saar for the first time since the 1940s, this time with the full honors due to a head of state. He visited the birthplace of Karl Marx in Trier and was feted in great style in Munich by the former 'militarist' Franz Josef Strauss. In a sentimental visit to his hometown of Wiebelskirchen, Honecker took aim at the heart of the prevailing two-Germany sensibility by saying he looked forward "to the day when the border will no longer separate us but unite us."¹⁶

With reunification no longer a live issue, the relationship between East and West Germany continued to improve as Bonn opened its deep pockets to the DDR's needs and East Berlin became more and more flexible, especially on the all-important issue of loosening border controls and facilitating human contacts between the two countries. Previously the DDR's concessions had been restricted to facilitating West to East visitations. Beginning in 1984, the regime decided that others besides retired pensioners should be allowed to go West. By 1987, more than 1.2 million East Germans under retirement age had travelled into the FRG. With hindsight, it is easy to see that the East German leadership of the mid-1980s, basking in the unaccustomed sunlight of domestic and foreign respectability, was living in a fool's paradise.

However, apart from the obvious economic benefits flowing from this improved relationship, the DDR did have powerful political motives for taking what, for a Communist government, was an uncharacteristic gamble. If freedom to travel were granted—although still with some controls—DDR leaders believed that one of the main complaints about the regime would be undercut and its legitimacy correspondingly buttressed. Internationally, it

seemed clear that this new openness would pay dividends, too. Indeed by mid-decade, so seductive was the notion that *Deutschlandpolitik* could be used to bridge differences between East and West, that more and more of the Social Democratic Party's leaders were treating the unification issue as if it no longer mattered. In their eagerness to pursue closer contacts with the SED and to arrive at common positions on security issues and ideological matters, many Social Democrats came to think of the DDR as a full sovereign partner of the Bundesrepublik. Although the governing Christian Democrats were critical of this "shadow foreign policy" being pursued by their parliamentary opposition, it was nevertheless clear that they, too, were so committed to strengthening inter-German contacts that reunification had also disappeared from their working vocabulary.

As it turned out, a treacherous sinkhole of discontent was lurking just beneath the deceptively solid surface of DDR public opinion. Despite copious self-congratulations from the SED on the wonders of industrialization achieved under its leadership, by comparison with its dynamic and well-fed brother in the West, the DDR was an undernourished waif, and the East German people knew it. Years of exposure to Western media and the regime's more relaxed attitude toward travel had allowed the population to size up quite accurately the enormous gap—economic, cultural, political—that had opened up between socialism and the social market society across the border. Thus, when the usual rigged elections were held in May 1989, many people seethed. And when a high party official praised the Chinese government for its repression of the demonstrations in Tienanmen Square, the first bubbles of frustration with the oppressive regime came even nearer to the boiling point.

Nothing, it seemed, became life in the East German paradise like the leaving of it. The first sign that all was not well came in September, when the reformist Hungarian government, having earlier parted the Iron Curtain just a little, now drew it wide open by allowing 7,000 of the large number of East Germans who annually vacationed in Hungary to cross the border into Austria. Condemning this perfidy by her sister state, an outraged DDR attempted to plug the leak, but another quickly burst open in Czechoslovakia, where would-be East German refugees swarmed over the Bundesrepublik's embassy in Prague, all clamoring to be set free. The DDR's decision to allow this group to go West via train backfired when mobs of people frantically tried to get aboard and flee to the Federal Republic. It was fast becoming obvious that the matter would not be ended by simply saying good riddance to a few troublemakers.

The discontent then escalated to outright political protest as demonstrations broke out in October, initially in Leipzig and then throughout East Germany. Crowds who at first chanted, "We are the people" shifted to the more incendiary, "We are the German people." The East German regime was paralyzed by these developments. Although it at first appeared fully prepared

to deal harshly with the demonstrators, at the last moment it lost its nerve. When the government failed to imitate the tough Chinese approach, the legs of its authority—legitimacy and power—were knocked out from under it. Neither loved nor feared, the DDR was thenceforth bereft of any ability to influence its citizenry. The belated ouster of the sclerotic Erich Honecker as party chief on 18 October, and his replacement with the younger and somewhat more flexible Egon Krenz, accompanied by a promise of "dialogue" with reform groups, failed to satisfy East Germans, who now harbored revolutionary expectations. Krenz was only the first in a series of relief pitchers who would fail to save the game for the DDR.

The protests spread, toppling not only the regime but also the authoritarian image of German political culture that many people continued to hold. According to historian Robert Darnton, "The peaceful revolution of 1989 did not just free the Germans from the last vestiges of more than a half-century's dictatorial rule. It freed us from what we thought of them."¹⁷ A leader of Neues Forum, one of the more prominent protest groups, explained that the East Germans could "no longer tolerate the kindergarten atmosphere, or constantly being led by the nose on all fronts."¹⁸

Had a hard-line Soviet regime been in power, to act as head coach of the socialist squad, it would certainly have found a way to quell the unrest. However, at the fortieth-anniversary celebration of the DDR's founding on 7 October, a visiting Gorbachev failed to deliver the much desired halftime pep talk to his dispirited team. If anything, he made things worse by suggesting that the DDR adopt the values of "democratization, openness, socialist equality, and the free development of all peoples" that he was promoting in the USSR. "We have to see and react to the times," he said, "otherwise life will punish us."¹⁹ The Brezhnev Doctrine, which had sanctioned Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe, had been formally repealed in July and replaced by what Gorbachev's spokesman called the "Sinatra (I'll do it my way) Doctrine."²⁰ Earlier in the year, the Bush administration had doubted the seriousness of Gorbachev's reforming intentions. He had been belittled by a presidential spokesman as a "drugstore cowboy . . . all hat and no cattle, all talk and no delivery." Now he was perceived as "real, real, outrageously for real."²¹

More dramatically yet, on 9 November the Berlin wall was opened in a last desperate attempt to satisfy the East German population by allowing freedom of travel. East German border guards, confused by conflicting signals from a government that was contemplating a more limited relaxation of travel regulations, took the initiative and allowed the swarms of people to pass through. Once the breach was made, there was no plugging it.

The next few days were a political carnival in which conventional behavior was suspended. East German crowds swarmed through West Berlin, marvelling at the sights. Spontaneous acts of generosity and celebrations of brotherhood took place everywhere. Toasts were offered and drunk. People

danced with strangers. A group of East Berliners marched to a library in Kreuzberg and returned some books that had been checked out in August 1961, just prior to the erection of the wall (no overdue fine was assessed). Atop the wall roosted people who once would have been shot dead long before reaching it. Indeed before long, the East German government would begin to disassemble the wall, piece by piece, and offer its sections for sale. Already a market was developing, fed by entrepreneurs (*Mauerspechte* or "wall peckers," they were called) who were quick to take hammer and chisel to the structure.

Although in retrospect it seems clear that the time had been coming, these unexpected events proved once again the adage that history is remembered backward but lived forward. Despite the expenditure of enormous amounts of mental candlepower by scholars and policy analysts, the flood-lights of the intelligentsia had failed to penetrate the murk of the future. Secretary of State Baker said the day after the wall was opened, "If anybody tells you that they knew this was going to happen yesterday they are smoking something."²² The West Germans were also ambushed by events, having been committed to a policy of giving face-lifts to an East German regime that was capable of being fitted only for a death mask. Fearful of having to absorb a flood of East German refugees, West Germany had decided that the encouragement of reform in the East was the most convenient course.

The opening of the wall was a symbol of the psychological collapse of the cold war order, but it was out of step with structural realities. Whereas its construction in 1961 had brought symbolic closure to the long-standing de facto division of Germany and Europe, its opening merely anticipated the collapse of a system that was still quite alive, if not exactly well. Although Communism may have lost the will to live, it was still fully capable of dying a violent death and taking others down with it.

After the bacchanal in the streets of Berlin came sober morning-after thoughts in Western capitals. The *New York Times* reported that President Bush "seemed less than elated by the day's events," an unfortunate impression that the president only heightened when he attempted to explain just why he was "not bubbling over." The French, more predictably, were also less than enthused. While the French public seemed remarkably at ease with the idea of reunification, Parisian intellectuals worried openly that a newly reunited German behemoth would turn France into a "marginal power." Former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing noted with a sense of foreboding that "France's own close relationship with Germany was based on equality."²³ Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in England, blunt as always, told the Germans, "You are going much too fast." With events rather than diplomats in the saddle, the governments obviously feared that the stampede to unity might crush in its path everything that had been built up since the end of World War II.

Rather than acting as joyful parents at the birth of a new era, the statesmen seemed more like fretful physicians determined at all costs to keep a dying patient alive. The emphasis on all sides was on moderation. From East Berlin, Krenz insisted that "reunification is not on the agenda." The willingness of the DDR to entertain reforms that would finally bring it into step with *perestroika* led Western officials and commentators to entertain hopes of, at best, some kind of confederation between the two Germanys in the near future. A few observers believed, as did a rather glum Henry Kissinger, that reunification was now "inevitable," but the "Doctor of Diplomacy" estimated it would take about three to four years to achieve it. Other old warhorses, however, like Paul Nitze, insisted that "nothing is inevitable," while the aged but still vital George Kennan tried to shush all the "loose talk" of reunification. The consensus within Washington, according to the State Department's director of policy planning, appeared to be that reunification was "a live, but still very remote possibility."²⁴ Gorbachev's warning that it was premature to talk about upsetting the postwar order was therefore "received with satisfaction" in Washington.

It was at this point that Helmut Kohl, realizing that his *Deutschlandpolitik* was hopelessly outmoded, began to take control of events. With marvelously poor timing, a *New York Times* analysis found it "almost tempting to pity Helmut Kohl these days. With history being made all around him, the lime-light seems to be everywhere but on the West German Chancellor." The *Times* contrasted the lackluster chancellor unfavorably with his prima donna of a foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who, while putting on his coat during a visit to Washington, had said grandiloquently: "Some touch it only, but I wear the mantle of history."²⁵ Having served first under Schmidt then under Kohl, it was the Eastern-born Genscher who was widely viewed as the German most anxious to promote unification—too anxious, many believed. However, such analyses seriously underestimated Kohl, who was determined to seize the historic opportunity to become the "reunification chancellor."

Apart from his need to deal with withering criticism at home of his unimaginative policy, Kohl was also concerned that all the talk about confederation by the major players might, if not challenged, impose an artificially slow speed limit on a situation in which diplomacy, for once, could conceivably approach the unlimited autobahn speeds. Thus, after consultation with a close circle of advisors that excluded Genscher, in a 28 November speech to the Bundestag, Kohl unveiled a surprise ten-point proposal for preliminary binational commissions that would lead first to "confederative structures" and then to a "federation," thereby taking Germany closer to full unity than most anyone else was contemplating at the time.

Despite Bush's earlier reassurance to Kohl that reunification was a "matter for the Germans," there was no turning of handsprings in Washington at the

news from Bonn. The United States had no desire to antagonize the West Germans by slamming on the brakes, but, as Stephen Szabo has noted, neither did it wish "to rub the Soviets' noses in their defeat and possibly undermine Gorbachev and his policies."²⁶ Aware of the need to avoid offending Soviet hard-liners who preferred that their East German trophy remain mounted to the wall, the Bush administration would in the coming year be extraordinarily sensitive to Gorbachev's domestic problems. Should the West overplay its hand, it might among other things, trigger a tough Soviet response in East Germany. "Everyone has this feeling that the way things have gone up to now is just too good to be true," said an obviously nervous policymaker.²⁷

Indeed, Gorbachev appears at first to have underestimated the consequences of the wall's opening. In his eagerness to see the transformation of the neo-Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe, he had failed to realize that reforming Communism was like giving electrical stimuli to a failing heart—the shock could be fatal. Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in December 1989 sized up the year's events as "the natural collapse of the command-administrative system."²⁸ But this welcoming attitude toward change was giving the Soviets more to handle than they had bargained for. Taking fright, Moscow soon announced its opposition to "recarving the boundaries of Europe" and tampering with the existing security structure. Unification was "not on the agenda," said Shevardnadze, following a meeting with Genscher on Kohl's ten-point plan. Just to make things perfectly clear, Gorbachev lost no time in letting Bush know that the Soviets continued to have vital interests in Germany. "The guy's really upset, isn't he?" said Bush to his aides.²⁹

Others were upset, too. "Western leaders have not been saying what they think about the central problem of a united Germany," reported Craig Whitney of the *New York Times*.³⁰ The mood in London and Paris was decidedly frosty to Kohl. French president Mitterrand had been quoted as saying, "I am not afraid of German reunification," but that was for public consumption only. Privately, as Margaret Thatcher recalled in her memoirs, he was "driven by a fear of the consequences of German domination." It was no secret that the outspoken Thatcher was herself dismayed by the possibility of a new "German juggernaut" being created in the near future. Thatcher preferred to wait another fifteen years or so until everyone was assured that democracy had taken full root in Eastern Germany. Although he paid for his candor with his job, Thatcher's finance minister, Nicholas Ridley, voiced the deep misgivings of many when he described reunification as "a German racket designed to take over the whole of Europe."³¹

Thatcher and Mitterrand consulted secretly on a number of occasions in an attempt to think up some artful way of slipping a wrench into the works. Offended at not having been consulted prior to Kohl's initiative, Mitterrand tried to deflect Bonn's eastward gaze by talking of "deepening" the European

Community as opposed to "widening" it. An ostentatious visit by Mitterrand to the DDR on 20 December and a trip to Moscow also underlined the continuing residual role played in Germany by the Allied powers.

In the end, Mitterrand could not bring himself to go public with his opposition, because he realized that it would summon up the very genie of nationalist sentiment that he wished to keep forever bottled up. The most that he could bring himself to recommend was a four-power meeting in Berlin that would serve as a not-so-subtle reminder to Bonn that it could not afford to ignore the interests of its former occupiers. Some in the United States agreed. Commentator Ronald Steel argued that "Americans and Russians have earned a voice in the coming settlement."³² Taking note of the discomfiture of their allies, portions of the German press began to grumble about latent anti-Germanism. "They always act as if we want something indecent," said *Der Spiegel*.

Naturally, all this gave rise to the question of whether the West actually wanted the reunification that for decades it had proclaimed was an unshakable goal of policy. Though in some cases accusations of hypocrisy were undoubtedly true, in the case of American public opinion, at least, they were far off the mark. In U.S. opinion polls, two-thirds of those questioned favored reunification, while only 16 percent thought a new Germany would make another bid for domination. Official Washington's view was more nuanced. As an abstract proposition, unity was a good thing for the same reason that an end to the cold war was, in principle, desirable. And even if it were not, it would be difficult if not impossible to renounce decades of policy utterances to the contrary.

Employing a cultural yardstick to measure the German problem, President Bush believed, as Reagan had, that the German national character had changed. "The Germans aren't any kind of threat at all," he was quoted as saying at a state dinner. "They are a totally different country from what they used to be."³³ But in this case structure was at least as important as culture. American advocacy of German unity had never been unconditional. It had always been predicated on the prior integration of Germany into larger European structures. NATO had been only a makeshift organization—long-term, to be sure—but now events were conspiring to diminish NATO's effectiveness before supranational European institutions capable of harnessing national ambitions were fully in place—thus the Bush administration's repeated emphasis in the coming months on the need for a new European "architecture." The new German wing under construction would have to blend stylistically with the rest of the European mansion.

The months following Kohl's proposal were dominated by attempts to regulate the reunification process. While continuing to insist that reunification ought to be worked out as a matter between the two Germanys, at a NATO summit in early December Bush set forth a number of external preconditions for reunification: consultation with allies and neighbors, integration with the

European Community, respect for Soviet security needs, and—most daunting of all—membership of a united Germany in NATO. This latter condition represented a revival of the maximalist American demands of the mid-1950s, this time, however, not so much out of anti-Soviet motives as from a desire to assure Germany's continued anchorage to the West.

Bush insisted publicly that he was not worried about a reunified Germany because Kohl had reassured him that the German "commitment to and recognition of the importance of the alliance is unshakable."³⁴ Nevertheless it was necessary to insist on continued alliance membership, since some Germans were clearly ready, as a condition of reunification, to shed their NATO suit of armor and don instead the flimsy vest of membership in the unproven Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the unwieldy body established in 1975 in Helsinki. The German insistence that Lance missile modernization, still desired by Thatcher and the NATO high command, was now a dead issue was interpreted by many as a sign of growing disenchantment with the alliance. The Germans, of course, were quite capable of employing a powerful strategic vocabulary to argue their point of view. They pointed out that the short-range missiles could now be used only against an East Germany and Eastern Europe that no longer held the same threatening aspect. "What do we need these missiles for—to bomb Lech Wałęsa?" asked one German official sardonically.

Despite German protestations of virtue, no one in Washington was in a mood to gamble. Cold war or no, Western statesmen were convinced that continued German membership in a European collective security system was indispensable to continental stability. Amid talk of transforming NATO from a military to a political alliance, Baker insisted that "the new architecture must have a place for old foundations and structures that remain valuable."³⁵

Shortly afterward, in a joint press conference following their storm-tossed summit aboard naval vessels off of Malta, Bush and Gorbachev flashed a yellow light. "We for our part, do not want to do anything that is unrealistic," said Bush, and Gorbachev pointed out that the existence of two German states "is the bidding of history."³⁶ But this view of things assumed a stable situation. Given his commitment to reform and the widespread anticipation that sweeping change was about to engulf Eastern Europe, it was clear that Gorbachev's comment would not be the last word on the issue.

Because the situation in the DDR continued to unravel much faster than anticipated, these caution signals failed to lift Kohl's foot off the accelerator. When Kohl had attempted to take the lead on unification, he had assumed that the DDR would survive for another few years at least. However, with the new year the pace of emigration to West Germany quickened to the point that it was beginning to cause great concern among West Germans fearful of being inundated by needy "Ossis." Indeed, by the end of 1990 about 2 percent of the East German population had migrated westward. At the

same time, growing resistance to the now-toothless government in East Berlin mushroomed to the point that Premier Hans Modrow was forced to move parliamentary elections to the Volkskammer from May to March. Early in February, Kohl proposed the immediate adoption of a single German currency based on the deutsche mark. Meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow at about the same time, Modrow announced plans for a German confederation, while the Soviet leader insisted that "no one had ever cast doubt on the unification of the Germans."³⁷

In a visit to Moscow in February, Baker agreed with Gorbachev on the need to regulate the external aspects of unification. However, the options he put on the Soviet leader's plate were not very savory: either a united Germany outside NATO, with all its potential for mischief, or "a unified Germany to be tied to NATO, with assurances that NATO's position would not shift one inch eastward from its present position."³⁸ (Indeed, the idea of a united neutral Germany was beginning to make nervous even the Eastern bloc countries, who soon began openly to voice their preference for a united Germany in NATO.) Shortly thereafter, Kohl arrived in Moscow and began to offer the Soviets various sweeteners to make unification more palatable. Although Kohl took pains to make it clear that the Germans' commitment to NATO was not negotiable, he did offer various compromises, what Baker referred to as "special arrangements," that had been thought up by Genscher.

While neutralism was ruled out for Germany as a whole, Kohl sought to assure the Soviets that NATO forces would not be moved eastward into the territory of the former DDR and suggested that NATO itself would be transformed from an exclusively Western body into a "kinder, gentler" alliance that would look eastward on matters of security cooperation. The Germans also promised to put some cash on the table to help with the withdrawal of Soviet troops, promised to fulfill the GDR's economic obligations to Eastern Europe, and provided reassurances that the new Germany's borders would not disturb the post-World War II status quo. Kohl, quite pleased, announced at the end of the talks that "this is a good day for Germany."

The institutional device for regulating the external aspects of reunification was dreamed up by Secretary of State Baker and his aides. Nicknamed "2 + 4," the approach would leave the internal aspects of unification to the two Germanys, whereas Germany's place in Europe would be settled in discussions with the four occupying powers. In this arithmetical system, the commutative law did not apply. The British and French would have preferred 4 + 0, and the Germans were wary that it not become 4 + 2, while other NATO members were angry at being excluded altogether from the process.

At a meeting of NATO and Warsaw Pact foreign ministers in Ottawa in early February, Baker tried out the 2 + 4 idea on Shevardnadze, who, while not thrilled with the notion, shortly gave the USSR's assent. At the same time, the Soviets accepted the American proposal that they reduce their

troops in central Europe, agreeing to an arrangement that would permit the United States to station about 30,000 more soldiers there than the USSR. There would be four formal 2 + 4 meetings in the course of the year. In addition, there were the so-called 1 + 3 meetings, between the directors of the Western foreign offices, that sought to concert positions vis-à-vis the Soviets and the Germans. But all this numerary talk only confused a situation in which basically the Allies would be acting as a board of directors, rubber-stamping the decisions of the chief executive officer, Helmut Kohl.

Later in February, Kohl met with Bush at the Camp David presidential retreat for another survey of joint strategy and a discussion of further incentives for Gorbachev, including a reduction in the size of the Bundeswehr. The only hang-up, created by a concern not to offend Eastern-born Germans in upcoming elections, was Kohl's refusal to guarantee the Polish-German border. The rapid growth in recent years of the right-wing Republikaner party had sensitized Kohl's political antennae to conservative public opinion within the country on Eastern issues. He therefore insisted that the problem had to be settled by an all-German government, which would be the "legally competent sovereign" in this matter. The question was not really whether the Oder-Neisse frontier would be confirmed, but only when, since Kohl made it quite clear that he did "not want to repeat the errors of history." By attempting to delay until elections, however, he left himself open to criticism from those who sensed a renewed German interest in territorial revision.

Although the U.S. government quite correctly sized up the border problem as "small potatoes," the issue nearly turned into a public relations disaster for Kohl. It did not seem unimportant at all to the Poles, who insisted on settling the matter prior to unification, nor was it a small issue in public opinion, as people wondered whether the new Germany, despite all reassurances to the contrary, might be reverting to traditional ways. Foreign Minister Genscher and the Free Democrats also disagreed with Chancellor Kohl to the point of nearly splitting the governing coalition. The border question was taken up at the 2 + 4 meetings and was not settled until mid-June, when the two German parliaments guaranteed the existing Polish borders.

But such crises were only minor speed bumps in what was fast becoming a race to unification. In February Kohl proposed rapid monetary union. On 13 March, he upped the ante by suggesting that the East Germans might be able to exchange their valueless East marks for deutsche marks at a rate of 1-to-1, up to a limit of 4,000 marks. This decision was made in the face of much economic advice to the contrary, which argued that such a move would touch off a severe bout of inflation.

In an area widely considered to be naturally sympathetic to the SPD, nationwide elections held in the DDR on 18 March produced a startling victory for a group called the Alliance for Germany, a bloc of three conservative parties seeking reunification under the West German constitution. Despite criticism of Kohl for trying to buy East German votes, public senti-

ment was clearly in favor of "deutsche mark imperialism." With this vote, the East German electorate rejected the Social Democratic insistence that unification should be negotiated between the two states. It signaled the people's immediate willingness to have the state completely absorbed into the Bundesrepublik as soon as possible, thereby shelving any ideas of an intermediate period of confederation.

There were those in both East and West critical of this growing pressure for an *Anschluss*, a word that sought deliberately to evoke memories of Germany's bullylike expansionism of the late 1930s. Those who were convinced, like the clergy and intellectuals active in Neues Forum, that the DDR was not all bad and who argued that unification offered a golden opportunity to blend the best of the two Germanys were overwhelmingly and peremptorily rejected by Germans who wanted to throw overboard the failed system and cash in on Western prosperity as quickly as possible. "Those who don't talk about money don't understand how we live," said one woman about the socialists' penchant for theorizing. Thus it seemed likely that the first free election in East German territory might well be the last; that the next vote might come in an all-German election.

Now able to work with the sympathetic government of Lothar de Maizière in the East, Kohl shortened the unification schedule by appealing to the economic interest of East Germans. At the end of April, he confirmed the one-to-one currency exchange ratio. Early in May, the two governments worked out the details of a treaty providing for financial unity, which was to take effect on 2 July. According to its terms, the East German state would adopt West German monetary, economic, and tax policies and dismantle its command economy. Signed on 18 May, Kohl hailed the treaty as "a first decisive step on the path to unity." But the surge of West German investment in the East had actually gotten under way long before this official starter's pistol was fired.

At this point, the two states were ready to consider a state treaty on unification, and on 15 May Kohl called for all-German elections to be held by the end of the year. He was now in more of a hurry, because West Germans, sensing that the festival of reunification would entail enormous costs, were beginning to have second thoughts about footing the bill. Apart from the huge deutsche mark subsidy, a massive reconstruction fund was also in prospect, as were higher expenditures for welfare. Kohl's promises to the electorate that no new taxes would be levied were received with widespread skepticism.

The East Germans did all in their power to push things along by debating in June, with an interested Kohl in attendance, the desirability of being swallowed whole by the python to the West. They agreed to take advantage of Article 34 of the Basic Law, which allowed new states to enter the federation merely by declaration. In July the East German ruling coalition welcomed Kohl's call for December all-German elections. But first the DDR would

have to dissolve itself in October into five states, which would then be absorbed by the Bundesrepublik.

Despite this progress and continued expressions of optimism from Kohl, reunification was still far from being a sure thing. Facing tenacious rear-guard resistance from conservatives in Moscow, Gorbachev began to get cold feet. Early in May, Shevardnadze told the Western foreign ministers that reunification and full German membership in NATO were incompatible and, in any case, that numerous security issues needed to be worked out before Moscow would agree to unity. The public Soviet position at this time on a Germany in NATO was, in Shevardnadze's words, that "NATO remains the same as ever—an opposing military bloc."³⁹

At the first 2 + 4 meeting in Bonn in May, Shevardnadze had proposed "decoupling" the internal aspects from the external aspects of reunification by allowing Germany to unify while maintaining four-power control pending the creation of a satisfactory new security structure. In a Washington summit at the end of May, Gorbachev repeated public suggestions that Germany be made a member of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This unusual proposal was greeted by Bush with incredulity. Even though Bush submitted a list of "nine assurances" on NATO and Germany, many of which had been test-driven earlier, it was clear following this tête-à-tête that the two sides still had some way to go before coming together. "It is not here that the German question will be resolved," Gorbachev told a news conference.⁴⁰

The Soviets made one more attempt at delaying a NATO solution. At the second 2 + 4 meeting, in Berlin on 22 June, Shevardnadze suggested a five-year transition period during which Germany would retain its obligations to both alliances, but with greatly reduced troop strength. However, the Soviet foreign minister indicated privately to his Western colleagues that he was only going through the motions, to show hard-liners in Moscow that resistance to the inevitable was futile. Happy to oblige, the Westerners unanimously rejected this latest Soviet "proposal."

It was now evident to Bush and Baker that the Soviet leader, while personally flexible, was encountering stiff resistance from those in the Politburo still not reconciled to the loss of Eastern Europe. At a Communist Party Congress in early July, Shevardnadze was booed when he tried to explain his German policy. Clearly Gorbachev needed concessions from NATO that he could use in his internal struggle with the diehards. But private discussions between Gorbachev and the West Germans suggested that there were some political levers available to remove the boulder of Soviet opposition from the road, and that economic measures might also prove helpful. A late-May secret meeting in Moscow between Gorbachev and Kohl's national security advisor, Horst Teltschik, indicated that German credits and burden-sharing with regard to expenses of removing Soviet troops from the DDR would be a crucial factor in persuading Moscow to loosen its grip on East Germany.

Eager to please, Bush, in a NATO summit in London on 5 July, pushed a series of proposals that would, symbolically at least, de-fang NATO. The London declaration as adopted sought to redirect the East-West relationship from one of confrontation to cooperation, promised a "reduced forward presence" in Germany, and, abandoning the long-held reliance on first use of nuclear weapons as a deterrent, pledged to make nuclear response a "last resort." The declaration also expressed a desire to strengthen the CSCE. In addition, contrary to previous expressions of an unwillingness to be "singularized," Kohl agreed to accept limits on the new Germany's armed forces. Obviously pleased at hearing of these concessions, a Soviet foreign ministry spokesman said of the hard-liners: "Now we can show them they are wrong."⁴¹

The final roadblocks to unity were removed in a meeting between Gorbachev and Kohl at Gorbachev's Caucasus home. The German leader did not come bearing all the gifts he had wanted to bring, having been turned down by his fellow Western leaders at an economic summit in Houston where he had requested 15 to 20 billion dollars in aid to Moscow. "One doesn't help his friends by throwing a great deal of money in a hole," British foreign minister Douglas Hurd had said. Nevertheless, on his arrival in the USSR Kohl found himself pushing against an open door as Gorbachev, convinced that reunification would take place with or without him, ignored the hard-liners and gave Kohl everything he wanted. Said one of the Germans present: "The Soviets seemed to come with the general idea to say yes. We filled in the details."⁴²

According to the terms of the agreement, a united Germany was free to remain in NATO, and Soviet troops would be withdrawn from East Germany in four years. Allied forces would remain in Berlin until Soviet forces had completed their withdrawal. In return, Germany would compensate the Soviets for the cost of withdrawing their troops. Following their exit, NATO-integrated Bundeswehr troops could be stationed in the new eastern *Länder*, but not foreign troops or nuclear weapons. The Bundeswehr would be reduced in size to 370,000 troops, including the navy.

Secretary of State Baker, thinking that he was fully on top of things, had been convinced beforehand that the Kohl-Gorbachev meeting would be a "nonevent." Now he was somewhat chagrined to admit that the news from the Caucasus came "a delightful surprise." All that remained was a last 2 + 4 meeting to ratify the results and provide for the termination of Allied rights in Germany.

With all the track signals now running green and East Germany's economy failing quickly, the throttle to unification was opened wide. In late August, the East German Parliament voted to unify with West Germany on 3 October, and a unification treaty was signed on 31 August. On 12 September, the four occupying powers concluded the 2 + 4 negotiations in Moscow by giving their blessing, though the proceedings were accompanied by the usual last-minute snafus and complications. The following day, the

Germans and Soviets signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation. The first all-German elections took place on 2 December, with the Christian Democrats again winning a plurality. Germany was at last unified—and the cold war was definitely over.

The diplomacy of reunification proved to be far less problematic than its economic and social dimensions, as hopes for a relatively rapid and painless transition were soon shattered. The economist Joseph Schumpeter once described capitalism as a process of creative destruction, which suggested that even in a normally functioning market system much painful change was always in process. In the case of the joining of East and West Germany, it soon became clear that, for some time to come, the dismantling of socialism would not be balanced by the creative input of capitalist enterprise. The headaches involved in reconstituting East Germany were enormous. Bureaucrats, soldiers, scholars, and intellectuals would find no ready employment in the new environment. East German farmers would have to learn to compete in an agricultural market where the main problem was oversupply. Inefficient firms would have to be sold off, resulting in massive unemployment. Romantic memories of an unspoiled, preindustrial rural utopia were rudely interrupted by the reality of a horribly polluted environment. The problem of reclaiming property confiscated by the Communists after World War II created enormous legal-bureaucratic tangles.

Added to these were problems of psychological and social readjustment. As was inevitable, the two Germanys had grown apart culturally. Problems of reconciling social policy on such issues as abortion, for example, added to tensions. Westerners complained that easterners were lazy and had forgotten how to work, while easterners resented being treated as country bumpkins. The problems were so daunting and the satisfactions of unification, psychic and material, were so meager that the term "bungled" came readily to mind in describing the way the process of unification was handled.⁴³

For the United States, too, the success of its long-term German policy brought little occasion for rejoicing. The end of the cold war saw no victory parades or celebrations, as the American public displayed a ho-hum attitude to the entire business. As the process of German reunification came to a close, the United States cast only occasional sidelong glances toward Europe, its attention being anxiously focused instead on the Persian Gulf and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. With history refusing to provide a decent intermission, the United States was forced to grapple with the problems of the post-cold war era before the cold war had even come to a close.

It may be that this absence of dramatic interest in the eyes of Americans was a consequence of the fact that the postwar history of the German question was a success story. Success stories are inherently less exciting than diplomatic crises or outright failures; perhaps diplomatic success is even boring. However, there is another reason that the German problem should have ended with a whimper. Despite much melodramatic talk about the explosive

dangers embedded in the issue, the transparent news coverage of this story, and the barely stifled yawns with which it was greeted, testify not only to the desire of publicity-seeking statesmen to receive credit, but also to the relatively nonproblematic nature of the process.⁴⁴

The events of 1989 and 1990 flowed from a realization that it remained for the diplomatists only to carry out the verdict of history. The German issue had to come to a peaceful conclusion for the same reason that the cold war had to end peacefully. Because conflict was against the rules and neither side was inclined to gamble, peaceful unification was the only kind conceivable. The anticlimactic ending was due less to the skill of the statesmen in avoiding the dangers—though they surely deserved credit for a job well done—than to the fact that the greatest dangers had already been avoided. *Détente* and *Ostpolitik*, coming as they did in the wake of war-threatening crises, were the products of a realization that the cold war and German reunification had to be settled historically, which meant that change could take place only if the powers were convinced that the German question in its old guises could no longer arise. In other words, the settlement of the German question presupposed its transformation.

While the culminating events of 1990 produced a satisfying sense of closure so far as diplomacy is concerned, a significant residue of doubt remained as to whether the German problem had in fact been left behind. Just as generals seem always to plan for the last war, diplomats and policy analysts seem determined to continue guarding against a revival of the German problem in forms and contexts long since surpassed. For such pessimists, historical memory tended to confuse historical judgment, clouding the fact that the German question was not a single ongoing problem but a series of problems continually in process of historical transformation.

There was, first, the problem that Germany presented to the United States between 1917 and 1945: the threat of world domination. For American internationalists, Germany was not the historical archenemy, but an enemy of history as American liberals preferred to see it develop. The German roadblock to world order was removed at a cost of two world wars, only to have the problem resurface, this time with the Soviet Union cast in the role of the villain. Germany thus proved to be only incidental to a more comprehensive problem that continued to preoccupy American diplomacy throughout the ensuing cold war. Viewed in this light, the problem was metamorphosed rather than solved; it was superseded and transformed by the cold war and remained unresolved until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Should the problem arise again in future, it is likely that it will have yet another form, just as the Soviet global threat differed significantly from that first posed by Germany.

Second, there was the problem of Germany's being positioned in the center of Europe, which appeared to be one of those uncomfortable facts of

geography that everyone was helpless to change. But geography in the modern world has, like much else, been relativized: the globalization of politics during the cold war superseded purely regional logic. Thus the underlying presence of the first problem throughout the cold war helped to resolve the second—by dividing Germany, by linking its respective halves to East and West, and, making assurance doubly sure, by getting the Germans to agree to it. In retrospect the solution of a divided Germany seemed almost preordained, but before it could be achieved Americans had to purge themselves of illusory hopes for cooperation with the Soviets and for a united Europe standing on its own feet.

In turn, however, this solution created a third German problem: that of reunification. A quarter century passed before the West Germans were willing to recognize that Germany would have to remain divided for the foreseeable future. During that time, the German problem was the source of much tension, especially in Berlin. Paradoxically, however, the Germans had to shelve their nationalist aspirations as a precondition to reunification, for which they continued to nurture hopes.

But German self-restraint was not the whole of the story. While *Ostpolitik* laid a foundation for the discontent within East Germany that played such a large role in forcing the pace of reunification, it was hardly a sufficient condition for ending the division of the country or of Europe. Had the Gorbachev revolution in the USSR not removed the repressive controls of Soviet power, the two-Germany solution might have remained viable for a long time to come. Ironically, reunification came at a time when interest in Germany unity was low and waning further and when both German states were preparing to settle down for a long period of separate maintenance. Visitors to East Germany in the 1980s were struck by noticeable differences in culture, language, and appearance between the two states that, had they been allowed to develop, might over time have eroded any sense of national identity.

The end of the cold war finally resolved—with a rapidity no one had dared to imagine and on terms wholly favorable to the West—the problem of German unity. But in so doing, it created a new problem: that of a Germany in a united Europe and a new world order. Western statesmen early in the cold war had anticipated the problems that a united Germany might pose, and rather than regress to a repetition of problem number two, they hoped to embed the new Germany in a European and global matrix from which it could not hope to break free—and, assuming optimal cultural change, from which it would have no desire to break free.

Following the success of unification, it was still open to question whether sufficient capital had been invested in this solution. The insistence upon embedding a united Germany in NATO provided safeguards, of course, but the answer to the German question presupposed the continuing vitality of the alliance. In the absence of a Soviet threat, many observers came to believe that NATO was an alliance without a mission. If NATO's task had

once been double containment, should a tame Russia replace the feral USSR, its only conceivable *raison d'être* would be the containment of Germany. "A united Germany is not likely to accept for very long a structure that rests on this premise," said one hard-boiled observer of affairs.⁴⁵ NATO's inability to deal with the dissolution of Yugoslavia was not an encouraging sign of the organization's capacity to deal with post-cold war security issues. Indeed, many were quick to identify Kohl's precipitate recognition of Croatia—historically linked to Germany in some unsavory ways—as the diplomatic signal that began the slide into chaos in the Balkans.

Another essential precondition of German reunification was that nation's integration into larger, federative European structures, such as the European Community. Indeed, Kohl and Genscher themselves made sure to play up on every occasion Germany's role as a good European. "Germany is our fatherland, Europe our future," said the Christian Democratic Union's 1990 electoral program.⁴⁶ Following the conclusion of the reunification drama, leaders of the European Community reached agreement in Maastricht, Belgium, in late 1991 on the desirability of monetary union as a prelude to political union. Had their schedule been followed, the Europeanization of Germany would soon have been well on the way to completion. However, events showed quickly that the proponents of European unity had been overly optimistic. Not only did popular resistance to a loss of national sovereignty remain strong throughout the Continent, but in Germany the policies of the Bundesbank made it clear that the financing of German unification conflicted with the economics of Europeanization.

Pushed into maintaining high interest rates by the inflationary pressures of paying for the integration of former East Germany, the Bundesbank forced other nations to follow suit to defend the value of their currencies on international exchanges and keep them within a pre-agreed common range. However, since these countries were in economic recession, the commitment to high interest rates meant that they were unable to open the spigot of credit at a time when an "easy money" approach was indicated as a matter of standard counter-cyclical policy. Worried as ever about inflation, the independent Bundesbank turned a deaf ear to the pleas of its European neighbors that it relax its monetary policy. Under heavy attack from currency speculators, France and Great Britain were unable, in the end, to avoid devaluation, and thus divergent monetary policies, prompted by German national interests, made a shambles of plans for monetary union and cast into question the prospects for political unity.

There was also a question as to where the new Germany would stand internationally. In the new world order, in which economics appeared to have replaced power politics, Germany, as the world's greatest trading nation, was definitely a world power. Consequently there were calls from many sectors to make Germany a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. But, as various military interventions by the UN showed, the economic view of the new world order was far too simple. With the great

powers still being called on to take military action in various world situations, membership on the Security Council presupposed Germany's willingness to amend its constitution to allow for participation in peacekeeping missions. Otherwise a Germany on the Security Council, though enjoying the legal status of a major power, would have an anomalous status as a nation that, by choice and necessity, was still "singularized." In July 1994, the Federal Constitutional Court finally ruled that multilateral military missions were legally permissible, but it remained to be seen under what circumstances Germany would agree to send its troops abroad.⁴⁷

Even if one assumes the worst outcome of the situation in the mid-1990s—a breakdown of the European idea and of the liberal international order—there will be no replay of past German problems. Were Germany to fulfill the worst expectations of its critics and become a nuclear power, the constraints of the nuclear era would prevent a repetition of previous adventurism. The "crystal ball" effect of atomic weapons, by which politicians and soldiers can forecast all too well the suicidal consequences of thermonuclear warfare, simply accentuates what the Germans had well learned in World War II. They had, at that time, already seen the future, and it did not work. For all that, diplomatic myths and the memory of Rapallo—now a cliché—have continued to dominate the thinking of statesmen.

However, a willingness to admit that structural change has taken place is not necessarily an admission that the German question, in its fundamentals, has been transformed. Much ink has been spent on yet another apparent constant: the problem of German culture and history that underlies everything else. At one time it was fashionable to fault Germany for her failure to develop a liberal sensibility and for cultivating instead a romantic yearning for national fulfillment that turned her into an enemy of civilization. For many in both world wars, the German problem was not grounded in politics but in the very nature of the German people, the deep structure of German national character. Some American policymakers entertained this notion of a diabolical culture, especially during World War II, but they had clearly abandoned it by the end of the occupation.

To the extent that there was a problem of political culture, it was treated by the Americans, in practical terms, by ideological means. Germany's successful integration into Europe and a liberal world community appeared to many to depend ultimately on whether this aspect of the German problem had been satisfactorily resolved. After a half century, many are still not sure. The Germans abandoned Nazism as a matter of necessity, to be sure, but have they embraced liberal democracy and Western civilization? The external circumstances of geopolitics have changed but have the Germans themselves changed?

As a Germany preoccupied with making a success of unification began to focus on its internal affairs, and as the strain produced by all the sudden changes produced extremist expressions of anger, foreign observers began once again to wonder whether the German problem had been resolved.

Would the East Germans add an element of political immaturity that would undo a half century of progress toward democracy? Attacks on foreigners—gypsies, Turks, Eastern Europeans, even American blacks—stimulated fears that the old demons lurking deep in the German psyche, long repressed, were once again threatening to haunt the rest of the world.

Overall, however, the German cultural problem is neither as grave as it may have seemed to some, nor as unusual. In its external aspects, this antiforeign sentiment is more broadly European than specifically German in character, part of a larger pattern of nativist resentment of a tide of immigration into homogeneous European societies. Its internal dimension, the endless agonizing over German identity, also amounts to less than it has been cracked up to be. Predictably, the vision of unification was so sentimental and melodramatic in its expectations that its achievement failed to provide the catharsis necessary to resolve the endless German identity crisis. But then, one needs to keep in mind that modernity has made *all* national identities and cultural essences problematic—witness the agonized debates within the United States over the implications of multiculturalism.

To be sure, some Americans have continued to harbor misgivings about certain features of the German national character, but in an era dominated by cultural relativism, those qualms are more than offset by a cosmopolitan understanding that unappealing cultural traits are not confined solely to the Germans, and by an awareness that there exists no standard cultural pattern for democracy. In any event, as always there is a ready recognition of the Germans' many outstanding virtues, while the Federal Republic's exemplary transition to good standing in the family of nations and its status as a good European has done much to dispel the notion that the German culture is a cancerous organ in the body of Western civilization.

Getting things back to "normal" for Germany and bringing Germany into harmony with America's image of the world required an amazingly comprehensive set of transformations—of Germany, Europe, the United States, and indeed of the entire structure of world politics. Unlike diplomatic systems of the past, in which balances of power had been like temporary cones on active volcanoes destined once again to erupt, the stability introduced by the policy of double containment allowed time for the process of modernization to do its work, making these peaceful transformations possible. By the time the policy had run its course, the German volcano was extinct.

However, for Americans and Germans caught up in this process of change, what looked like a happy ending was, in fact, only a problematic beginning in an ongoing story of adjustment to new realities. Whatever the successes and failures of the German-American relationship in the future, they will not mechanically echo the past. In the half century since the end of the Second World War, both the world and the German question have been transformed. Any further change in the German question will build on the new structures and processes created out of those transformations.