

ELIZABETH POND

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# Beyond the Wall

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Germany's Road  
to Unification

A TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND BOOK

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To Doris and Robert Peel

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demonstrators, Kohl declared at the beginning of February, "If the DM [deutsche mark] doesn't come to Leipzig, then the Leipzigers will come to the DM." He was now ready to make the proposal for an East-West German currency and economic union that Interior Minister Schäuble had first floated in mid-December. Overriding the vociferous objections of the Bundesbank, on February 7 Kohl proffered the GDR the mighty deutsche mark even before political union.<sup>54</sup> He also began talking about joint elections as early as 1991.

To the many German and European challengers who criticized him for rushing things indecently, Kohl kept citing the folk adage: "We must get the hay into the barn before the storm." On occasion he also quoted Napoleon: "S'engager, puis voir."<sup>55</sup>

## Chapter 13

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# *Two Plus Four Equals One Germany*

After the fact, Bush administration officials circulating in the innumerable seminars on the subject would explain their success in the German-American steering of unification in 1990 with the deprecatory quote from Yogi Berra, "We didn't make the wrong mistakes." This observation contained a good deal of wisdom, and a tribute to a policy that in the midst of tumult always stayed two jumps ahead of Gorbachev and of those Germans who wanted a united Germany to distance itself from the Western alliance.

The American decision in mid-January to let unification rip ahead as fast as possible—despite British and French foot-dragging, and despite Baker's own precept of gradualism propounded in Berlin a month earlier—was one of the West's preemptive leaps. The Genscher plan and "two plus four" were others.

### The Genscher Plan

At this hinge of history any vigorous Soviet bid to veto NATO membership for a united Germany might well have succeeded. Most opinion polls were inconclusive in that they did not measure one value against another; both NATO and unification enjoyed consistently high approval ratings in West Germany.<sup>1</sup> There was a widespread assumption that the Soviet threat had evaporated, however, and that NATO had fulfilled its work and would not be needed in the future. Conventional wisdom equated fewer weapons with more peace, and many voters (ranging from

40 to 50 percent to 80 to 90 percent depending on the phraseology in the questionnaires) were distressed by NATO's reliance on nuclear deterrence.

Moreover, German self-pity—this time over the real lack of support for German unification from France and Britain and a perception by the elite of a lack of support from the United States—had not yet dissolved into the energies devoted to the myriad practical tasks of union. This environment too could have strengthened West Germany's urge to part with allies if unity were really at stake.

Certainly in East Germany street interviews suggested that public opinion almost universally rejected NATO membership.<sup>2</sup> Foreign policy, so long as there was no risk of war, was no urgent concern of citizens preoccupied with reorienting their own daily habits of forty years. It was taken for granted, though, that the two Germanys would end membership in their respective military blocs as soon as they merged.

Thus, assessing the mood in early February, analysts from across the political spectrum in West Germany believed that if a collision between NATO and German unity arose, NATO would lose. Here the Social Democratic party (SPD) was not the only question mark. Among West German conservatives there were vestiges of old Gaullist longings (associated in the 1960s with Bavarian potentate and nuclear enthusiast Franz Josef Strauss). Some Western diplomats and the National Security Council (NSC) feared that even Kohl, whose instinct for the political jugular was his most highly developed faculty, might sacrifice NATO if anti-NATO sentiment developed in the Federal Republic or if Gorbachev told Bonn that his domestic survival depended on keeping a united Germany out of NATO. They noted, among other clues, that in his ten-point speech on November 28 the chancellor did not refer to the Western alliance except to thank it for its commitment to unification. Chancellery sources dismissed such speculation as misplaced. From the beginning, they said, Kohl was determined not to accept unification without firm Western ties. However naive its hope might have seemed to others, the government was operating with a "metaphysical optimism," as one official put it, "that we could convince the Soviet Union of its interest in NATO membership" for Germany.

As it turned out, latent Gaullism on the right never found a spokesman. Misgivings about NATO on the left did, in the persons of Egon Bahr on the SPD's left and even Karsten Voigt, an SPD Bundestag member who for years had been active in NATO parliamentarians' assemblies. Moscow would never tolerate the GDR's slippage into NATO membership, they contended. Gorbachev was already making so many concessions to the West that hardline domestic opponents were attacking him for losing Eastern Europe. If the GDR added insult to injury by not even turning neutral, but actually joining the adversary alliance, that could be the end

of Gorbachev and of détente in Europe. It was much too dangerous a gamble.<sup>3</sup>

The corollaries were implicit: if a united Germany could not be a member of NATO, that meant that West Germany would quit the Western alliance, and if the Federal Republic withdrew from NATO, Congress would surely pull back U.S. forces deployed in the Federal Republic and elsewhere on the continent. That hundreds of thousands of GIs remained in Europe forty-five years after the end of World War II was in any case a wonder. It would not have taken much to trigger their return home.

Yet a continued U.S. presence in Europe was essential, allied strategists agreed. Only the American superpower could provide insurance against the Soviet nuclear missiles still targeted on Europe, and only the United States could also carry out the last of NATO's missions as described by the alliance's first secretary general, Lord Ismay: keeping "the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down."

By 1990 the issue was no longer keeping the democratically reformed Germans down as in the 1940s. But there was a more subtle need—which the West Germans themselves accepted—for the American counterweight to growing German might to assure the anxious French, Italians, and Dutch that the Germans would not overwhelm them. And for a West Germany whose legitimacy in foreign policy was still overshadowed by the memory of Hitler, there was a more subtle need for a partner whom Bonn could work with in launching its own initiatives.

For a quarter of a century France had performed this function in Europe in a symbiosis in which the Germans provided economic clout and the French provided licitness. With this new ascent of Germany in 1990, however, France became too small and parochial to be Bonn's main partner in dealing with extra-European affairs. Only the United States had the size and the range of global contacts with the Soviet Union, for example, and the will, to be able to affect Soviet conduct on German unification.

Against this backdrop Genscher rushed—the day after public Soviet acceptance of unification—to avert a contest in the minds of German voters between unification and continued German membership in NATO. Even after German merger, he proposed, NATO should forswear military extension onto the territory of the then GDR in peacetime. During a transition period of several years the Federal Republic should also refrain from moving its forces assigned to NATO, as the bulk of them were, to that area. Further, the Soviet Union—which was already having difficulty absorbing Soviet soldiers returning from Hungary and Czechoslovakia and was housing tens of thousands of them in tent cities—should be able to keep troops in the GDR for another three or four years before removing them all.<sup>4</sup>

The last point was as much arrogation as promise. Even half a year

earlier, no Western leader would have presumed to "offer" Moscow the opportunity to keep in East Germany for a few more years the forces it had stationed there for decades.

### Two Plus Four

Genscher immediately flew to Washington to present his new plan in person, and on that visit "two plus four" was born. On February 1, in a brainstorming session, Zoellick, Ross, and Elbe wrestled out what kind of international framework might accommodate the domestic German union that was now racing ahead.<sup>5</sup>

With those twenty top-category Soviet divisions in the GDR, with nuclear weapons always hovering in the background, and with the peace of agreed stalemate of the past twenty years now turned unpredictable, this need was no mere procedural detail. In a negotiation in which every country involved except the United States had an emotional stake in the outcome, a good bit of the all-important quotient of final satisfaction or resentment would depend on getting the terms of participation right. In the Soviet Union Gorbachev might have just consented personally to German merger—and might be painfully aware that another Soviet resort to force in Eastern Europe would destroy perestroika—but his political longevity was always in doubt. Although he had performed his breathtaking high-wire act for five long years on the premise that there was no alternative leader and no alternative domestic policy to grudging compromise between radical reformers and reactionaries, his base for consensus was getting narrower and narrower. The loss of the GDR might render it razor thin.

Certainly Russia had a long history of violent conservative reversal whenever reform and Westernization went too far and a popular yearning for "order" set in. And psychologically, however irrational any neo-Brezhnevite turn might seem to Westerners, the sober reckoning of potential gain and risk is most prone to emotional distortion when an autocrat is losing (rather than gaining) power, and sees only a desperate now-or-never choice before all power vanishes. Indeed, the first concrete warning of such a backlash, in domestic criticism of Gorbachev for letting the GDR get out of control, was already looming at an enlarged plenum of the Soviet Central Committee on February 5. The hardline discontent that would culminate in the attempted coup of mid-1991 was already mounting.

In the longer run too there was a danger of humiliating the Soviet Union now in the way Germany was humiliated after World War I, and thus inviting some future Soviet Hitler to avenge the shame. Both Bonn and the political level at the State Department therefore consciously sought

to avoid creating a Soviet pariah that might one day seek violent revision of the post-cold war order.<sup>6</sup>

The NSC saw things somewhat differently. It agreed, as Bush would stress, that the United States should not gloat over Soviet misfortunes, but since events were nudging Gorbachev aside anyway, the NSC opposed prolonging Soviet superpower pretensions by showing Moscow any deference in the unification process.

One further hazard, as some British, French, and American officials worried, was that Gorbachev might now achieve through weakness what he had failed to achieve through strength: German neutralization through a conclusion by euphoric German voters and politicians that all threat had now vanished. The Soviet leader had yet to define the terms of unification he would accept, and he certainly had not modified Shevardnadze's assertion of the previous November that with no Warsaw Treaty Organization, NATO would be not be needed. Modrow had further specified neutrality for a unified Germany, and the NATO alliance looked outmoded or untenable even to many in the United States. Moreover, at this point the Bonn government itself had not made a clear public commitment to continued full NATO membership.

The challenge, then, was to design a mechanism that might reconcile the internal and external aspects of unification, persuade the Soviets to withdraw their divisions from the GDR and give up their residual four-power rights in Germany, and still avoid all the pitfalls.<sup>7</sup>

The Soviet Union certainly had its own ideas about how to proceed. Since mid-November it had been pressing hard for four-power management of the German transition. Washington thought it had fobbed Moscow off with the December 11 ambassadors' meeting, but on January 1, and again on January 10, Shevardnadze wrote to Baker proposing another four-power session at the ambassadorial level or higher.

In response, the United States, backed by Britain, rejected any meeting of the four above deputy ambassador level and insisted that the Germans be present at any discussion of Germany's future. For reasons of both justice and politics the United States wanted to end the period of the Federal Republic's incomplete sovereignty—a relic of World War II and Bonn's postwar need for foreign security guarantees—and give the Germans a full voice at whatever international table might be set up.<sup>8</sup> Such a maturation was overdue, and would be healthy in turning debate about Bonn's security policy from a foreign (and latently anti-American) issue into a domestic one. The Federal Republic too thought the time had come for full sovereignty, as Genscher made clear at the end of January.

A four-power instrument excluding the Germans was therefore out of the question. So was a decision by the two Germanys alone that would not settle the leftover four-power rights. NATO was equally inadequate. The

Western alliance would include West Germans, but it would exclude the Soviet Union, thus ignoring the Soviet army in the short run and isolating Moscow in the long run. Nor was the thirty-five-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) the proper venue. That body reached agreement by consensus, and no one wanted to give Liechtenstein and the Vatican gratuitous vetoes over German unity. Nor would a final, unwieldy peace conference of the three dozen World War II belligerents (including such unlikely participants as Uruguay) be appropriate. Bonn absolutely ruled out a formal peace conference in any case; it refused to be put in the dock four decades later as the successor to the German Reich and to be dunned by all and sundry for more reparations than it had already disbursed voluntarily. Washington backed Bonn in this determination, and worried lest Moscow suddenly call for a peace conference as a propaganda circus.

In mulling over the dilemma, Dennis Ross's State Department policy planning staff had written a paper floating the notion of a "two plus four" conference attended by the two Germanys as full participants, and the four World War II victors in Germany: the Soviet Union, the United States, Britain, and France. Such a grouping would be small and flexible and would fold into the process the still "balky" British and French, as well as the Soviets.<sup>9</sup> If set up carefully—with the United States insisting from the start that the end result must be a totally sovereign unified Germany—it would give the Germans a full voice in their own destiny. On February 1 Zoellick and Ross raised the idea with Elbe. Elbe, who thought they were proposing a generic council of the six without pinning down the level of German participation, sounded out Genscher on the ride into town from Dulles Airport on February 2. Genscher approved, so long as the configuration was clearly two plus four, with equal rank for the Germans, and not some four plus two relegation of the Germans to a second-class side table as at the last peace conference in Geneva in 1959.<sup>10</sup>

Within a week of Baker and Genscher's agreement on two plus four, Baker flew to Moscow, stopping off at Shannon Airport on the way to discuss the latest initiatives with French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas. On February 8 and 9, he basically sold Gorbachev on two plus four as a process that would keep the Soviets engaged in Europe rather than letting them get pushed out by the tumultuous events. It was a gamble. "What one didn't know, the big wild card, was what the Soviets would do," Zoellick noted in retrospect. The administration nonetheless brought "maybe a belief in rationalism" to its approach to superpower relations from its experience in developing mutual trust with Shevardnadze. "We saw with Shevardnadze, if we could explain what we called 'points of mutual advantage,' and we had momentum going for us, we [could advance]."<sup>11</sup>

At this point Baker made a rare slip in a late night press briefing in Moscow in which he spoke—contrary to firm American policy by then—of possible German "association" with NATO as an alternative to full membership. To correct the gaffe, the State Department briefer stressed to American reporters traveling with Baker at the next stop, Sofia, "It's membership, membership, membership!" Back in Washington the NSC staff made personal calls to embassies in Washington to read off Baker's later (correct) references in the same press conference to full German membership in NATO. And in one of the several saving instances in which the Russians trailed American reflexes by a critical month, Gorbachev failed to exploit Baker's error and press immediately for some associated status for Germany in NATO.<sup>12</sup>

Hot on Baker's heels were Kohl and Genscher, who flew to Moscow to see Gorbachev on February 10. Bush sent Kohl a letter on February 9 intended to reaffirm Washington's total support for unification and to stiffen Kohl's resolve not to yield on the issue of the Western alliance even if Gorbachev should stage a major crisis over the issue. In the letter Bush described specifically the firm measures the United States would take to block any attempt to use Soviet rights and responsibilities in Germany to slow down realization of German national aspirations. In addition, he set forth American views on what the West needed on NATO. The overall message, one American official suggested, was persuading Kohl "to keep his sights high and to keep him from a determinist view of history." In subsequent conversations with the Americans Kohl would refer to Bush's letter several times as a landmark.<sup>13</sup> The same day Baker, after his own talks in Moscow, sent Kohl another letter debriefing him on the Soviet-American conversations, discussing tactics, and explaining why two plus four was a good idea and would not slow down unification.

The joint Soviet-German declaration in Moscow said both sides agreed "that the Germans themselves must resolve the question of the unity of the German nation and themselves decide in what kind of state system, in what time frame, at what speed and under what conditions they wish to bring about this unity." The chancellor, having gone to Moscow with the multiple Russian warnings about German unification still ringing in his ears, was ecstatic about the results of the trip. His foreign minister, having partially discounted these warnings already as aimed more at Kohl and the Christian Democratic Union than the Germans in general, was less surprised by the Soviet openness, but by the same token was less impressed by this specific leap of progress. On the flight home Kohl popped open the champagne bottles, a gesture Genscher thought overdrawn. Shortly thereafter Teltschik, to the scorn of the Foreign Ministry, declared that the key to German unity now lay in Bonn. Genscher, bouncing from the tarmac to a television talk show, began steering public dis-

cussion away from NATO toward economics, stressing that Bonn would fulfill all the commercial contracts the GDR had had with the Soviet Union.<sup>14</sup>

Even at this late date, the NSC and the European Bureau in the State Department, largely unbeknownst to each other, both resisted the two plus four concept. They feared that Kohl might interpret it as a shift in U.S. policy toward unacceptable four-power intervention, that it would unnecessarily restore lost influence to the Soviet Union, and that it would enable the Soviets to slow down the course of unification sufficiently to preserve old Soviet levers in the new Germany. In particular, they worried that Moscow, while posing as the champion of unification, might be able to impose unacceptable conditions that would cast the United States as the barrier to union, perhaps demanding a nuclear-free Central Europe or a presence by Soviet forces in Germany so long as American forces remained there.

This rift between the NSC and the State Department's European Bureau on the one hand, and the State Department's political level on the other, would be the most serious interagency clash over Germany in the administration. The NSC opposed two plus four vehemently, but lost out to the Bush-Baker connection as Baker got Bush's oral approval of the concept at the last moment in an Ottawa-Washington telephone call.<sup>15</sup> Long afterward, one NSC member—who noted that with hindsight two plus four did seem to be the obvious solution—expressed heartfelt relief that the depth of the differences within the administration never leaked to the press at the time.

After the whirlwind diplomacy in Washington and Moscow, the various foreign ministers now set out for an "open skies" conference of NATO and Warsaw Pact states in Ottawa. The formal business of the conference was another stage in the conventional arms reductions talks, this time centered on confidence building through surveillance overflights over the adversary's territory, and on a new American initiative to cut superpower troops in Europe even more.

The latter was important to the West as a way to transform the old concept of East-West parity to a new principle of inequality between the sturdy NATO and the rapidly disintegrating Warsaw Treaty Organization. During the previous forty years, when the West's persistent aim in Europe had been to reduce Soviet superiority in heavy ground weapons, the goal of equivalence had provided a useful public shorthand in arms control. However, now that Gorbachev had agreed to parity (even if he had not yet signed on the dotted line in Vienna)—and now that the East Germans, Hungarians, Czechoslovaks, and Poles were further reducing the Warsaw Pact's strength by deserting it—the West wanted to signal that its voluntary political alliance should not be equated with the compulsory Soviet mili-

tary alliance. NATO would not vanish just because the Warsaw Treaty Organization was disappearing, and the West intended to preserve a qualitative, and not just a quantitative, balance between the Soviets who would be withdrawing their troops only 600 kilometers across relatively easy land lines of transport, and the Americans who would be withdrawing their troops 3,000 miles across the sea. Washington therefore proposed—and Moscow accepted surprisingly quickly—lower ceilings for the number of superpower soldiers in Europe that would keep 195,000 American and 195,000 Soviet troops on the central front, but would allow the United States to keep an additional 30,000 troops elsewhere in Europe.

This achievement was upstaged, however, by the full international acceptance of German unification at Ottawa on February 13. The Germans themselves would determine the "internal aspects" of unification without outside interference. A peripatetic two plus four conference would be set up to regulate, in legally binding terms, the "external aspects" of German unification and the security of neighboring states. There would be no formal peace treaty ending World War II, but all the leftover four-power rights and responsibilities in Germany would cease. The West further specified that Germany should have full sovereignty at the moment of unification: there would be no special status for Germany and no limitation on its choice of alliance membership. Furthermore, by the date of unification Soviet forces should be committed to a withdrawal from Germany by a stated deadline.

To make sure that the Soviets would not use the two plus four talks to obstruct or delay sovereign German unity, Washington also insisted to Moscow that while the two plus four delegates could discuss anything, they could negotiate only how to end the four powers' residual rights in reaching this goal. On all other matters the forum could act only as a clearinghouse in parceling out issues to various other bodies for resolution. Two plus four would present its final results to the CSCE for that institution's endorsement, but neither the CSCE nor any other council would have the power to alter the terms of German unity.

Suddenly it dawned on the public that German unification was going to come very fast indeed. The smaller European nations felt steamrollered, especially when Genscher snapped at the offended Italian Foreign Minister Gianni de Michelis at Ottawa, "You're not in the game."

The NSC, after sounding out Kohl's reaction, now realized that two plus four was a fait accompli and turned its energies to delaying the first foreign ministers' gathering until after the March 18 East German election, to pinning down precisely what two plus four could and could not do, and to eliciting from Kohl the firm commitment on terms of NATO membership it felt had previously been lacking. On the last point the NSC's concern was heightened by a domestic squabble in the Federal Republic



about the military regime that would prevail on the territory of the former GDR once unification took place.

### Bonn Politics

The Bundeswehr, looking at the specific regime the Genscher plan would establish in eastern Germany, was appalled. The suggested constraints, it seemed, could prohibit the defense of what would soon be a part of the Federal Republic. Senior levels of the West German armed forces, feeling that the West German foreign minister had outmaneuvered them too many times in the past, now prodded Defense Minister Gerhard Stoltenberg to challenge Genscher, establish the principle that there be no zones of "unequal security" in Germany, and stake out a claim to east German access for regular Bundeswehr officers and men.

Genscher sharply rebuffed Stoltenberg. Kohl, objecting to a major row in his cabinet so close to the GDR election, instructed his head of Chancellery to settle the quarrel. In consequence, Stoltenberg was muzzled. The odd joint declaration of the two ministers on February 19 carried explicit self-renunciation even further than previous vague formulations in stating: "The sentence that no units and institutions of the Western alliance will be moved to the present-day territory of the GDR refers to the NATO and non-NATO assigned forces of the Bundeswehr."<sup>16</sup>

In retrospect, after Stoltenberg's vision of a Bundeswehr command operating in the ex-GDR became the uncontroversial military regime in the united country, Foreign Ministry officials would explain Genscher's initial rough rebuke of Stoltenberg as no opposition in substance, but rather a silencing of unhelpful public discussion at a delicate period. The top reaches of the State Department were inclined to appreciate this sensitivity to helping Gorbachev save face.

The NSC was more suspicious, both of Genscher's public remarks and the German foreign minister's stress in private talks with American emissaries on what the Soviets would never accept. It did not yet know its own mind, but it knew it did not like what it heard from Genscher. It therefore sought to shift the focus from prejudging what the Soviet reformers could bear to ensuring that the NATO security guarantee would cover the former GDR, whatever the eventual military regime there. It also made sure that the name for this concept was neither Genscher's original formulation nor Teltchik's subsequent reference to the GDR in one briefing as a future "demilitarized" area, but rather NATO Secretary-General Manfred Wörner's vaguer anticipation of a "special military status" in the former GDR. After some ambiguity about future east German conditions

on Baker's part in early February, the NSC pinned down Wörner's coinage as the standard in Bush's letter to Kohl of February 9.

This package quickly became NATO's official position, regardless of the Genscher-Stoltenberg statement of February 19. It extended NATO protection to the former GDR upon unification, yet still offered unilateral restraint. This could, the West hoped, let Gorbachev argue to his domestic critics that NATO was not taking advantage of the Soviet loss of empire.

It also gave centrists in the West German Social Democratic party a graceful way out of the left-wing position that a united Germany could not belong to NATO. Party Chairman Hans-Jochen Vogel quickly stated that neither neutrality and a German *Sonderweg* nor "extension of NATO at the expense of the Warsaw Pact" was the proper course. Instead, Germany must be embedded in a pan-European peace order that would take the place of the opposing alliances.<sup>17</sup> Even the countercultural daily *Tageszeitung*, while hardly becoming a fan of NATO, noted the alliance's benign constraints on Germany.<sup>18</sup>

The potential collision between NATO and German unity was thus deflected to a very different collision, should any develop, between full or limited German sovereignty. It was no longer a case of the United States insisting on German membership in NATO as a precondition for unification. It was, instead, the United States insisting that Germany have full sovereignty, including, as the CSCE treaty specified, the right to choose its alliances. In this context Washington would not be blamed for blocking German unity, but Moscow would be if it refused to let the Germans choose membership in NATO.

There remained then only the need, the NSC thought—the political level at the State Department was much more relaxed about the issue—to elicit from Kohl an explicit declaration of Germany's desire to stay fully active in NATO to ward off any dilution of German military participation in the alliance in the course of negotiations with the Soviet Union. The next opportunity for such a statement was Kohl's visit to Camp David for shirtsleeve diplomacy on February 24 and 25. The means was a joint press declaration that the NSC prepared for Bush to read in the name of both leaders. The gist was that a united Germany would remain a full member of NATO, continue to assign German forces to the alliance's integrated military command, and continue to host "substantial U.S. nuclear and conventional forces." Kohl concurred, and the NSC gave the declaration wide publicity.<sup>19</sup>

### Timing

With the two plus four mechanism and Western policy guidelines now in place, a tactical issue of timing remained to be resolved. Some working-

level American, British, and French diplomats, and some of the smaller European countries as well, felt they were being bulldozed by the Germans' speed. Policymakers in Washington did not share these misgivings. The NSC, in common with Kohl's Chancellery, wanted to go as fast as possible on internal unification to create an irreversible *fait accompli* for Germany's neighbors, including the Soviet Union. The State Department's European Bureau was inclined to defer to Bonn on pacing in any case. The political level at the State Department also favored letting the Germans proceed as swiftly as they wanted, but thought that getting the two plus four process going was essential to include the Soviets before they were completely shut out by the rush of events.

Among American and German players, the NSC was the party that wanted to go most slowly on opening two plus four. Its object was to delay these external negotiations relative to rapid domestic unification so as not to give Moscow a lever for slowing down that unification.

In these various calculations Western policymakers believed that in the short term time worked for them, but in the undefined medium term might work against them. In the short run, as the momentum of free elections propelled the Germans toward union, Moscow would realistically have to adjust, they thought. They dismissed cynical American media commentary that assumed that Moscow could just keep its army in Germany until it got its preferred terms. They believed that troop defections, demoralization, and possibly even dangerous clashes between these forces and the East German population would create their own pressures for Soviet retreat. Yet they thought there was only a limited window of opportunity to secure Soviet consent to unthinkable German unification before Soviet hardliners yanked Gorbachev back, either with or without his acquiescence. The trick would be to let unification proceed fast enough for the impetus to persuade Gorbachev to cut his losses by voluntarily consenting to the process, and thus remaining a player, but not so fast as to trigger the explosion by reactionary forces in Moscow that Genscher feared. In this balancing act the very speed of developments helped both the West and Gorbachev, who were much faster on their feet than the rigid Soviet conservatives.

### Deciphering Soviet Policy

In dealing with the Soviet Union at this point, the approaches of the American and West German bureaucracies thus differed, but again served to reinforce rather than militate against each other. In Bonn both the Chancellery and the Foreign Ministry stressed the importance of offering carrots to Gorbachev and Shevardnadze to sell unification to Soviet hard-

liners. The incentives would eventually include billions of deutsche marks and technical and organizational assistance. But they started with the more intangible mutual trust that Kohl and Genscher both felt they had established with the Soviet leaders. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze were treated with scrupulous dignity as members of the "common European house" and not as aliens.

As Genscher summarizes it, "Basically, my strategy was to say to the Russians that for them a united Germany in NATO would be better than the German division that always stood between us. I always said to Shevardnadze, *the relations you could have with a united Germany will be more important for you than the sum of your relations with the GDR and us.*" He kept pointing out further that "German unification is no isolated process, but will change the situation in Europe more rapidly and fundamentally than the division of Germany did. . . . We could create a new relationship between the alliances."

The American approach to the Soviet Union was more skeptical, but in practice complementary. The Americans were certainly making every effort to hear from Gorbachev and Shevardnadze what sort of rhetorical changes they needed to make to "de-demonize" NATO in Soviet eyes. They, along with the Germans, were very happy to have NATO "extend the hand of friendship" to the Soviets and state explicitly that the latter were not viewed as enemies. They were glad to have invited Shevardnadze, the first Soviet foreign minister to be so honored, to address the NATO Council in Brussels on the surprisingly early date of December 19, 1989.

Much more than the Germans, however, the Americans continued to view the process of rapprochement with their old superpower rival as conditioning, or educating, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze as well as other Soviets, and not just as easing the two leaders' selling of NATO to their hardline colleagues. The Americans judged Gorbachev's top priority to be perestroika, and saw the Soviet leader's acceptance of a cooperative relationship with the West as a necessary and welcome tool to that end, but not yet a cornerstone of Soviet policy in its own right. American tactics therefore entailed, far more than did German tactics, persuading the Russians that successive *faits accomplis* were being created on the ground in Germany, and that the Soviet Union should accept these voluntarily if it did not wish to shut itself out as a player. In less polite phraseology, Washington relied on Gorbachev's sense of reality to convince the Soviet leader at each point that his less worse step would be to bow to the inexorable.

From their somewhat different premises, then, Washington and Bonn coordinated their policies toward the Soviet Union in exemplary fashion. "Gorbachev cared about only two countries, Germany and America," notes Genscher. So long as their policies fit together seamlessly—as they did in

1989–90—the Germans were covered. “If America had so much as hesitated [on backing Germany], we could have stood on our heads” and not gotten anywhere, he adds.<sup>20</sup>

An anomalous several months would follow, in which Soviet spokesmen would consistently reject German membership in NATO and float various half-hearted alternatives. Yet they did not object vigorously to NATO membership in the early stage, when such objections would have had the strongest impact on West German voters. And time and again various Soviet officials and others indicated privately to Western visitors that Moscow actually would prefer not to leave an enlarged Germany as a loose cannon, but would like to see it balanced in some way by the continued presence of American troops in Europe.<sup>21</sup> Gorbachev would not be able to voice such a preference out loud, the moderate Soviets surmised, until after the battle for authority was fought out at the forthcoming party congress in July.

During this period the West found it hard to decipher which was the real Soviet policy. This was an old conundrum, of course. Ever since Moscow had decided that the oil crises of the 1970s were not the death throes of capitalism and that a minimum of cooperation between the two systems was necessary for economic well-being as well as for nuclear survival, contradictory motives had been at work in Soviet policy toward Germany and Western Europe.

Defense, intimidation, security overinsurance, and feelings of superiority and inferiority all fed into declaratory policies that might develop in any of several directions. So did justifying Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe; maximizing Soviet influence in Western Europe; gaining a Leninist breathing space now the better to combat capitalism later; holding Western Europe hostage against U.S. strategic missiles; exorcising the trauma of World War II occupation; keeping the Americans in Europe to restrain the Germans; deciphering the sometimes enigmatic American superpower; persuading Europe to persuade America of particular policies, tapping Western technological wizardry; and simply muddling through the multiple Soviet domestic crises.

By 1990, puzzling out Soviet policy was made even more difficult for the West by the lag of official statements behind the logic of Gorbachev’s “new thinking” and by the new cacophony of voices under Gorbachev’s glasnost. It was hard for Western military analysts to believe that the Soviet superpower, with its strategic nuclear arsenal and the largest army in Europe, really feared an utterly tame Bundeswehr that was under firm civilian control. If it did, however, and especially if it wanted to avoid any urge by Germans to acquire their own nuclear weapons, then it would have been much smarter for Moscow to bind Germany to NATO rather than detach it. This certainly was the explicit preference of the Poles,

Hungarians, and Czechoslovaks, expressed both unilaterally and in an unprecedentedly captious Warsaw Pact foreign ministers meeting in mid-March.

In this context the vehement public Soviet opposition to German membership in NATO that eventually emerged seemed inexplicably counterproductive. It could only increase the stakes in terms of Soviet prestige and make it even harder for Gorbachev to reverse course eventually without losing face. Yet Gorbachev’s and Shevardnadze’s negative pronouncements and backtracking continued.

Thus, even though Gorbachev had accepted in 1989 the guideline of bringing Soviet and Warsaw Pact heavy ground weapons down to NATO levels, in 1990 he balked at completing the Vienna negotiations to confirm this. Though Shevardnadze had agreed early on in contacts with the United States and West Germany that a formal peace treaty ending World War II was unnecessary, he resumed talking about just such a treaty at the first two plus four ministerial meeting in May. Although the Soviet foreign minister had paid an unprecedented, friendly visit to NATO headquarters one day, he sought a loosening of Germany from it the next in requesting German membership in both military alliances, or perhaps political but not military membership in NATO on the French pattern, or perhaps Soviet membership in NATO.<sup>22</sup>

The Soviet Union further slowed down its unilaterally planned troop withdrawals from the GDR in 1990, and spokesmen vacillated between attributing the deceleration to technical problems or to bargaining pressure on the West. Moscow proposed, variously, having an international referendum on German unification, neutralizing and demilitarizing a united Germany, having the CSCE take a leisurely decision on German unity in a year’s time, arranging for oversight by the Soviet Union (and other World War II victors) even over domestic aspects of German union, leaving external security arrangements ambiguous even after the two Germanys merged, abolishing nuclear weapons in Europe, reducing nuclear weapons in Europe to a minimum, retaining a Guantanamo-type enclave of residual Soviet forces in eastern Germany, pulling out all American troops from Western Europe as all Soviet troops left Eastern Europe, and continuing to station Soviet and American troops on German soil.

All the Soviet suggestions seemed almost random, however: they never added up to any coherent alternative to the Western proposal. Nor did Gorbachev take advantage of the obvious opportunities to reinforce Modrow’s insistence on neutrality or to go over the head of the Bonn government to court the West German Social Democrats as the Soviet Union had done in the early 1980s. Whether out of preoccupation with Kremlin infighting, the floundering Soviet economy, and Lithuania’s gathering independence movement, or from a hunch that German anchoring

in NATO would actually best serve Soviet interests, Gorbachev initially let the issue ride. The most precise expression of the core Soviet concern was Gorbachev's assertion in late February that while the two Germans had a right to unity, Moscow too had an inalienable right to ensure that reunification did not lead to "moral, political, or economic damage" for the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup>

Interpreting the Soviet response was made even harder by the pluralism of unofficial Western conversations with Russians. Vyacheslav Dashichev of Moscow's Institute of the Economies of the World Socialist System—the man who had correctly prophesied the end of the Brezhnev doctrine—told the newspaper *Die Welt in March* that the NATO issue was not a major problem.<sup>24</sup> Yet his voice was only one among dozens of contrary headline comments, and the latter issued from the more authoritative Soviet specialists on Germany, including current and former ambassadors to Bonn and the senior Foreign Ministry official on German policy.<sup>25</sup>

### NATO: If It Ain't Broke . . .

As they sifted the evidence, numerous senior Western analysts became convinced that the Kremlin would not yield on NATO membership, and they began advocating either alternatives or inaction. The father of containment, George Kennan, one of the first to react to the opening of the Berlin Wall, urged the United States to proceed with the utmost caution and postpone all decisions for several years.<sup>26</sup> Former National Security adviser and current Georgetown University professor Zbigniew Brzezinski envisaged an even longer period of perhaps twenty years in which NATO and Warsaw Pact forces would stay on in their respective Germanys.<sup>27</sup> Historian John Lewis Gaddis argued that the best solution would be double German membership in both NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization.<sup>28</sup>

Stanley Hoffmann, chairman of Harvard's Center for European Studies, foresaw the end both of an American-dominated NATO and of German acceptance of American occupation of Germany. He advocated emasculating NATO to its 1949 origins, before an integrated military command was set up. In his scenario the United States would maintain the American nuclear guarantee and a conventional presence in Europe, but the superpowers' main institutional link to Europe would be a strengthened CSCE that would also keep both great powers at arm's length. A new Western European defense organization would assume primary responsibility for Western European security, and the British and French would supplement American deterrence by extending their own nuclear umbrella over Germany.<sup>29</sup>

Hoffmann's Harvard colleague, Samuel Huntington, proposed that Germany belong to NATO but be largely disarmed.<sup>30</sup> University of Chicago strategist John Mearsheimer, worried that the stable bipolar world was now going to revert to an unstable scramble for balance-of-power advantage, went so far as to advise Germany to acquire its own nuclear weapons.<sup>31</sup> Columbia University political scientist Jack Snyder, concurring in the widespread view that NATO was bound to vanish as the Soviet threat and Warsaw Treaty Organization vanished, proposed primary supervision of German confederation by the European Community, warned against any union of the two German armies, and sought the perpetuation of two German states with guarantees of their sovereignty by the superpowers.<sup>32</sup> Various others, presuming that the Germans would ask American forces to leave once the country was unified—but also presuming that stability required the continued presence of U.S. forces in Europe—contended that France would have to give up its quarter-century distance from the NATO military command and invite American divisions to France.<sup>33</sup>

European recommendations were equally diverse, ranging from Otto von Habsburg's proposal for a full European federation, to German Social Democratic plans to substitute a CSCE system of collective security for NATO's collective defense, to Mitterrand's ambivalent wish to ensure the continued presence of American troops in Europe while reducing America's (and Germany's) political influence through his pet East-West European confederation with Gaullist overtones.<sup>34</sup>

In the end Bush rejected all radical innovation in NATO on the basis of the old American adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." He raised smirks for stating that now that the Soviet Union was not the threat it used to be, NATO's main enemy was instability. But this longest lasting alliance in history did give the United States a familiar channel for insuring Western Europe against any Soviet return to military intimidation, acquisition of nuclear weapons by militant Soviet minorities, ethnic shoot-ups between East Europeans no longer restrained by the pax sovietica, or even an overbearing Germany. Moreover, NATO existed and had become a habit in American foreign policy. It did not have to be invented, and American public support for it did not have to be created from scratch. U.S. troops would clearly be reduced in Europe under the new conditions, but voters' willingness to pay for the ones that remained would not have to be generated anew.

Throughout this period Bonn too opted to interpret each new Soviet rejection of German membership in NATO primarily as rhetoric for domestic Soviet consumption, and to stick to the Genscher plan without budging. In countering the Soviet abhorrence of German membership in his own multiple meetings with Shevardnadze, Genscher also played to some extent on Soviet anxiety about that potential loose cannon. His

"strongest argument was always . . . we must not do anything provisionally. . . . There must be no questions left open for a united Germany."<sup>35</sup> After each meeting with his Soviet counterpart, Genscher accentuated the positive to reporters and observed that the Russians had not yet said their last word.

### The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe

To help encourage that desired last word, both Americans and West Germans sought to maximize the area of East-West cooperation. One obvious arena for this was an enhanced CSCE. Beginning in February, Genscher energetically lobbied the United States to offer the Soviets a kind of pan-European security council that would guarantee them a voice in European affairs even after their troops left Eastern Europe.

Baker was skeptical. The CSCE had been a political football in the United States ever since its initial Helsinki conference got caught up in the ideological battles that eventually brought Ronald Reagan to the White House. The American right considered the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 a sellout that legitimized Soviet-imposed postwar borders in Europe.

Yet in the intervening years, the minimal statement on human rights inserted into the Helsinki agreement at the insistence of the West Europeans had stimulated astonishing ferment inside the closed East European regimes. A series of ad hoc review conferences had kept the spotlight on repression of dissidents, and governments that finally acknowledged the legitimacy of foreign states' interest in their human rights performance had kept releasing political prisoners in order to avoid international criticism. This, in turn, emboldened more citizens to discover and speak their minds.

The fateful Hungarian decisions to dismantle the barbed wire on the Austrian border in May and not to force East German emigrants to return to the GDR in August 1989 could both be traced in part to the moral suasion of the CSCE. More broadly, Western assurances at Helsinki that the East-West borders were inviolable (though not unchangeable if peaceful means were used) had allowed Solidarity to spring up and demand domestic change in Poland without fearing exploitation of any resulting Polish crisis by German "revanchists." Helsinki—and the rise of the unorthodox Mikhail Gorbachev to lead the Soviet Union—paved the way for the peaceful revolution of 1989 throughout Eastern Europe.

In retrospect, the Americans acknowledged the CSCE's political virtues. In the realm of security, however, they certainly did not want utopian ideas about vague collective security among erstwhile adversaries to replace NATO's proven commitment to collective defense among democratic

friends. Initially, also, they were wary lest Genscher try to substitute the CSCE for NATO, or let Soviet troops stay on in the GDR without any departure deadline in an effort to help Gorbachev. Such an ambiguous arrangement, Washington thought, could threaten stability by generating pressures—from German citizens wishing to be rid of the Soviet forces—to get rid of Western allied troops as well as a price for hastening Soviet withdrawal.

The United States therefore rejected any grandiose ideas of a European security council with real powers. Once the Americans were persuaded that Genscher intended the CSCE to supplement rather than supplant NATO, however, and that Bonn would eventually pin down Moscow on the removal of Soviet divisions from the GDR, they saw no harm in elevating the CSCE modestly. They agreed to the CSCE summit at the end of 1990 that Moscow had proposed—if the Vienna agreement on conventional arms control were already signed and ready to be endorsed by the summit. They reckoned that giving the floating CSCE conferences some regularity—and even permanence in the form of a small secretariat—would not challenge the rationale of NATO. If this then helped Gorbachev sell Soviet retreat from East Germany and Eastern Europe in the Kremlin, so much the better.

Still, no Westerner knew where the Soviets might, in the American phrase, draw the line in the sand. Some said at the preservation of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Some said at the line of demarcation between the Soviets' external empire in Central Europe and internal empire in the Baltics. No one knew for sure. In the end even the most optimistic Westerners would be surprised that the Soviets did not drive a much tougher bargain.