

The Bush Administration and the Concentric Circles of German Unification

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In April 1990, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State James F. Dobbins described German unification “essentially, as a set of concentric circles.” At the center was the “self-determination process which has taken place in East Germany as it has achieved democracy and expressed itself quite clearly on the subject of unification.” The next circle consisted of the bilateral discussions between the FRG and GDR. On the international level, the Two-Plus-Four brought together the German states with the four powers that had continued occupation rights.¹ Dobbins concluded, “And then, you move beyond that to further broadening this circle, so that it involves Germany’s neighbors, and, eventually, all of the countries that participate in the CSCE process, the 35 nations of Europe, the United States, and Canada.” Dobbins’ statement before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe demonstrates that the administration of President George H.W. Bush envisioned that German unification would be conducted multilaterally. Each level of the circle had its part to play in the process. Although negotiations among the two German states and the four occupying powers were critical, the international community needed to ensure that the interests of Germany’s neighbors

¹ The Two Plus Four framework consisted of the two German states (FRG and GDR), and the four powers that retained occupation rights of Germany (the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union). Baker conceived the Two Plus Four formula, and the participants formalized it in February 1990 at the Ottawa Conference. Under this model, the two German states would decide on the domestic elements of unification, and the four powers would agree on the new Germany’s external orientation. The order of the digits was significant. The Soviets (and to a lesser extent the French) wanted the “Four” to come first because it would demonstrate that Germany was unifying only with the occupying powers’ acquiescence. The others, however, believed that it was important to give the impression that the Germans were leading the unification process. Baker told Shevardnadze in February 1990 in Moscow that “the orders of the digits might not matter in mathematics, but they did in politics. The outside powers must not leave the impression that they were imposing a settlement on the Germans. The two German states must first deal with each other, and only then should the other four enter the negotiation.” For this quotation, see Matlock, *Autopsy On An Empire*, 384.

be “addressed and that the end result of the process will be one which does not disadvantage them.”²

There was a precedent for anchoring German power into international organizations. In the early years of the Cold War, Western policymakers believed that they had to integrate what would become the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) into multinational structures to ensure that it remained in the Western camp.³ The Cold War may have been, above all, an ideological struggle, but each side recognized Germany’s critical geostrategic position.⁴ It was clear that if one side could harness the power of a unified Germany, it would shatter the balance of power in Europe. American officials also feared the emergence of a neutral, revisionist Germany in the heart of Europe, seeking once again to create *Mitteleuropa*. They considered the potential of a unified Germany acting independently or collaborating with the Soviets to be too portentous in the context of the escalating Cold War. The West created a series of overlapping international organizations to address the “German question.” NATO was established not only to counter potential Soviet aggression, but also to prevent the reemergence of German militarism. The Schuman Plan and the European Coal and Steel Community, which later evolved into the European Community, economically integrated the economies of the FRG and France (and later Western Europe).⁵ These organizations

² Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: German Unification and the CSCE Process*, April 3, 1990, 2. Dobbins also might have mentioned that Western Europeans demanded that reunified Germany be even more tightly integrated into the European Community, and the United States insisted that German power be integrated into NATO.

³ See, for example, Carolyn Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line: The America Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴ The most prominent argument about the centrality of Germany to the Cold War is Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁵ See William I. Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Andrew Moravcsik, *The*

contained West German power by integrating it politically, economically, and militarily with North America and Western Europe. The international community used a similar strategy during German unification in 1990. The memories of the Second World War still resonated with most policymakers, and officials ensured that the new Germany was tightly anchored by its international commitments.

This paper explores the way the United States promoted the role of the CSCE, the largest of the concentric circles, during German unification.⁶ Historians generally focus on the three inner levels, ignoring important contributions to German unification from the CSCE.⁷ The Bush administration's strategy for German unification can be examined by

Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power From Messina to Maastricht (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁶ The CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe), created in July 1973, was a product of détente, conceived to lower Cold War tensions. 35 European nations (and the United States and Canada) sent representatives to Helsinki to discuss political, economic, and humanitarian issues in an open forum. The Helsinki Conference originated in part from a long-standing Soviet desire for the West to recognize the status quo in Europe. As GDR officials noted in the late 1960s, "the focus of Soviet policy is on guaranteeing the territorial status quo, aiming at preventing West German plans for a revision of the results of the Second World War." See "Current Essential questions in the Soviet Union's Politics of Ensuring European Security" April 26, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PA AA: MfAA C 326/77 <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110078>. After two years of negotiations, the Soviets and their Eastern European clients accomplished what they had wanted for about 25 years: Western recognition of European borders. They also received trade agreements and access to Western capital. In return, the Soviets accepted the Helsinki Final Act. It included, "Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." In this section, the signatories agreed to "promote and encourage the effective exercise of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and freedoms" and other guarantees of human rights.

Although the Helsinki Conference was a political disaster for President Gerald Ford (he was attacked at home by conservatives who compared Helsinki to the American "betrayal" of Eastern Europe at the Yalta Conference in February 1945), the human rights agreements would ultimately play an important role in facilitating the end of the Cold War. As William I. Hitchcock contends, Helsinki "gave dissenters inside the Eastern bloc a powerful tool with which to upbraid their governments about their record on human rights."⁶ It established an international norm that the Soviets promised to respect, serving as a brake on Soviet repression of its Eastern European satellite states. It gave rise to groups of intellectuals, such as Charter 77 under Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia, in the Eastern bloc that organized to ensure their governments obeyed the Final Act. The CSCE was characterized by its pan-European scope, and its commitment to humanitarianism and human rights.

⁷ The literature on German unification from the German perspective is surprisingly large considering the short time that has elapsed since the event itself. Of particular use is *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik: Deutsche Einheit*, a collection of official German sources. The literature on the American role, however, is thin. Many documents from the Bush administration remain classified, although the Bush library at Texas A&M has expedited the declassification process. The seminal work from the American perspective remains Condoleezza Rice and Philip Zelikow, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*.

identifying its goals and the tactics that it used to achieve them. It is clear that the Bush administration considered continued German membership in NATO as its primary objective. Although a reformed NATO and financial assistance from the FRG were indeed important “carrots” for Gorbachev, I argue that by spring 1990 the Bush administration came to see that the use of the Helsinki Final Act and the CSCE would be an effective tactic to convince Gorbachev to accept unified Germany in NATO. Mary Sarotte is correct to argue that officials in the Bush administration feared that the CSCE would serve as the vehicle for German unification, but she overlooks that Bush officials believed that they could use the CSCE as a lever to achieve their main objective.⁸

As two NSC staffers during the Bush administration, they had unparalleled access to the documents and have been instrumental in ensuring that many of the sources they used are available to scholars.

⁸ The Bush administration had good reason to consider the CSCE inadequate to serve as the vehicle for German unification. I place myself in opposition to a growing number of scholars who claim the West missed a unique window of opportunity to reconfigure the international system in such a way that would have firmly integrated Russia. Mary Sarotte is the most prominent of these scholars. In *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*, Sarotte argues that after German unification, “the chance to foster enduring cooperation with an unusually willing, if weak, Russian leadership passed, and it will not appear again soon.” See Mary E. Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2009), 214. Vladislav Zubok is more critical, contending that Bush was “driven by ideological messianism and emotional politics, not strategic wisdom.” See Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War From Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), xix. David S. Foglesong contends, “US officials did not make the most of opportunities to influence developments in the last years of the Soviet Union.” See Foglesong, *The American Mission and the “Evil Empire”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199. The use of the CSCE, the scholars claim, would have integrated the Soviet Union into the international community and allowed defunct Cold War institutions like NATO to become obsolete.

The Bush administration, however, was not driven by ideology. There were substantive reasons for the United States to reject Gorbachev’s ill-conceived plan for unification. The Bush administration continued to view the relations with the Soviets and German unification through a Cold War lens. The president (and many of his European colleagues) believed that the United States was the stabilizing force in Europe. The CSCE could not provide the same security infrastructure as NATO.

Bush also recognized that European events were moving in favor of liberal capitalism. Forcing Gorbachev to accept Germany in NATO was going to be difficult, but Bush was confident in its success. Bush’s confidence was supported by the fact that Gorbachev never articulated how German unification should proceed if it were based on the CSCE. The scholars who claim that German unification represented a missed opportunity also do not describe how unification along these lines would have looked. Indeed, they are as vague as Gorbachev himself. Finally, using the CSCE would have allowed Eastern European countries to participate in negotiations. As Baker remembers, “CSCE’s rule of consensus would give the smaller states of Europe veto power over issues far beyond their standing.” Although officials, such as Dobbins, recognized that it was important to ensure that the settlement was acceptable to Germany’s neighbors, they did not want the Europeans to dictate the terms of the settlement. The Bush administration was firm that unification must be conducted according to American interests.

This tactic came in three forms. First, the Bush administration relied on the Helsinki principle, which implied that the Germans would be able to choose their own security organization. A central component of both *perestroika* and Gorbachev's "new thinking" in foreign policy was adherence to the principles of self-determination and democracy. Gorbachev could not reject a German decision to remain in NATO if he believed that people should be able to choose their own governments and security organizations. Gorbachev opposed a unified Germany in NATO, but by using the Final Act, the Bush administration caught Gorbachev in his contradiction.

Second, CSCE approval of German unification also gave the settlement symbolic international legitimacy that no other body could offer. The Two-Plus-Four in the process ensured that American, British, French, and Soviet concerns about unification would be addressed, but the Eastern Europeans and the smaller NATO allies were not represented in these talks. They were unable to voice their concerns in a formal setting and had to do so through informal channels. Bush constantly spoke to Eastern European leaders throughout the process, but they were not invited to participate. In particular, Bush was concerned about reassuring Poland about the integrity of its western border with Germany. Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki informed Bush, "The Polish people are paranoid about agreements being made over their heads."⁹ Bush reminded Kohl, "You know and I know your European neighbors are nervous about this. Sometimes I forget to consult. But you and I must take care to consult with our smaller

⁹ "Meeting with Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki of Poland," March 21, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-03-21--Mazowiecki%20\[1\].pdf](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-03-21--Mazowiecki%20[1].pdf)

NATO partners.”¹⁰ Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti was particularly concerned that Italian concerns would be marginalized. Bush tried to reassure him, saying, “I will insist on full consultation within the Alliance. It is not the role of the US to sit around and divide up the world.”¹¹ The United States, Bush believed, could not carve up the continent like the European great powers of the past. This would violate American ideals and damage the United States’ role as the guarantor of liberal values. The CSCE’s approval could provide symbolic pan-European legitimacy.

Third, the Bush administration offered Gorbachev a strengthened CSCE process in future European affairs as a carrot for accepting Germany in NATO. As Bush observed, “Gorbachev has to be provided with face, with standing. That’s a key point.”¹² Gorbachev’s plan for German unification involved using the CSCE to bring the Soviet Union into the “common European home.” The turning point here was the July 1990 NATO Summit in London. Bush reported to Gorbachev, “We tried to shift the emphasis in the document to envisioning a Europe in which no power feels isolated.”¹³ The Bush administration offered an expanded role for the CSCE as a vehicle to bring the Soviet Union into the common European home as Gorbachev so craved. Particularly in the face of an eroding Warsaw Pact, Gorbachev saw a strengthened CSCE as a useful “bribe.”

This is not a comprehensive history of German unification, or even of the United States’ role in the process. Rather, by focusing on the United States and how it planned to utilize the CSCE, I hope to show the important contributions to German unification from

¹⁰ “Meeting with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany,” February 24, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-02-24-Kohl.pdf.

¹¹ “Meeting with Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti of Italy,” March 6, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-03-06--Andreotti%20\[1\].pdf](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-03-06--Andreotti%20[1].pdf)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev,” July 17, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-07-17--Gorbachev.pdf

the broadest concentric circle. Historians recognize that German unification was intimately tied to processes of European integration. Frédéric Bozo, for example, has shown how closely intertwined German unification and European integration into the EC were in the eyes of the French government.¹⁴ Scholars, particularly of American foreign relations, however, marginalize the CSCE. Robert L. Hutchings, in an essay entitled “The United States, German unification and European integration,” does not even mention the CSCE in his discussion of the American view on European integration in 1989-90.¹⁵ NATO was undisputedly the central piece of Bush administration’s strategy, but the Bush administration used the CSCE as a lever. Historians should see, as Dobbins did contemporaneously, that the CSCE was an important part of the concentric circle model that had watched over German power for forty years. The responsibilities of NATO and CSCE were not mutually exclusive; like the other levels in the concentric circle, they were complementary. It is difficult to judge the importance of transnational ideas and norms on bringing about the end of the Cold War, but it is clear that the United States recognized that the CSCE, as part of Dobbins’ concentric circle model, had a critical part to play.

The Berlin Wall Comes Down

The Eastern European revolutions of 1989 caught everybody by surprise. The CIA, for example, concluded in early December 1988 “given the realities of the [Soviet] system, Gorbachev can only hope to lay the groundwork for a process of change that

¹⁴ See Frédéric Bozo, “France, German Unification and European Integration,” in *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 148-58.

¹⁵ Robert L. Hutchings, “The United States, German unification and European integration, in *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal*, 119-32.

could take decades.”¹⁶ Only a week later, however, Gorbachev shocked the world at the United Nations in an address to the General Assembly by declaring, “all states should renounce the use of force in the international arena” and that the Soviets would reduce its military presence in Eastern Europe.¹⁷ No longer dominated by Soviet suzerainty, peaceful revolutions (with the exceptions of Romania and Yugoslavia) evolved throughout the Eastern bloc in 1989.

The American role in the revolutions was negligible. Bush resisted domestic pressure to be more proactive, believing that American involvement might provoke communist crackdowns. He wrote in his diary on November 8, 1989 that critics were “jumping around saying we ought to be doing more. What they mean is, double spending. It doesn’t matter what, just send money, and I think it’s crazy.” Bush recognized that the events in Eastern Europe were moving in favor of the West and worried that American action might undermine the democratic movements. “If we mishandle it,” Bush reasoned, “and get way out looking like [promoting dissent] is an American project, you would invite crackdown, and...that could result in bloodshed.”¹⁸ Baker noted that the Soviets would allow changes in Eastern Europe, “but they do not want us aggressively fomenting change. They will allow changes as long as the East European states remain in the Warsaw Pact and the CEMA.”¹⁹ Cautiously optimistic, the Bush administration

¹⁶ “Document No. 33: CIA Intelligence Assessment, “Gorbachev’s September Housecleaning: An Early Evaluation, December 1988,” in *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War In Europe, 1989*, ed. Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zubok (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 327.

¹⁷ “Speech by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev at the UN General Assembly,” December 7, 1988, in *Europe Transformed: Documents on the End of the Cold War*, ed. Lawrence Freedman (London: Tri-Service Press, 1990), 275-80.

¹⁸ November 8, 1989 diary entry quoted from Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 148.

¹⁹ “President’s Lunch for Allied Representatives,” September 25, 1989, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1989-09-25--Allied%20Representatives.pdf

welcomed the democratic changes in Eastern Europe but prudently remained on the sidelines.

Bush himself was the first in his administration to promote German unification unequivocally. As Jeffrey A. Engel has shown, Bush did not share the fears of a resurgent Germany with his European and Soviet colleagues.²⁰ The president believed that Germany had earned its reputation as a stable democracy and had sufficiently distanced itself from its Nazi past. Indeed, as Bush later told Kohl in February 1990, “we don’t fear the ghosts of the past.”²¹ Like many officials, Bush had not given much thought to German unification in the early months of his administration, but came to support it. In September 1989, he remarked during a press conference that some believe “a reunified Germany would be detrimental to the peace of Europe, of Western Europe, some way; and I don’t accept that at all, simply don’t.”²² After the press conference in September 1989, Gates remembers calling Scowcroft and saying, “‘Brent, we now have a policy on German reunification.’ He said, ‘What is it?’ I said, ‘We’re for it.’ He said, ‘Who says so?’ I said, ‘The President.’ He said, ‘Oh, shit.’”²³ Many in the administration were skeptical. The division of Germany had proved to be stable since the early 1960s, and a push for unification might trigger instability. Bush, however, believed in Germany

²⁰ Jeffrey A. Engel, “Bush, Germany, and the Power of Time: How History Makes History,” *Diplomatic History* 37(4) (September 2013): 639-63.

²¹ “Meeting with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany,” February 25, 1990.

²² “The President’s News Conference in Helena, Montana,” September 18, 1989, *Public Papers of the President* (hereafter “PPP”). All citations from the PPP can be found online at http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php.

²³ Robert M. Gates Interview, Miller Center, University of Virginia, George H.W. Bush Presidential Oral History Project, July 23-24, 2000.

and Kohl. As he told Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, “I think Kohl is for real.”²⁴

American officials had always publicly supported unification, but privately believed that division was acceptable because it offered continued stability. The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 transformed the issue of German unification from hypothetical to concrete. Kohl, just arriving in the German capital, told Bush that being in Berlin was “like witnessing an enormous fair. It has the atmosphere of a festival.”²⁵ Although supportive of German unification, Bush’s reaction to the fall of the Wall was measured and calm. He told Kohl “we will not be making exhortations about unification or setting any timetables. We will not exacerbate the problem by having the President of the United States posturing on the Berlin Wall.” Such actions, Bush feared, might trigger “unforeseen action in the USSR or the GDR that would be very bad.”²⁶

Initially, there were two plans to deal with the fall of the Wall. Kohl’s plan, which Sarotte names the “revivalist model,” called for a confederation of the two German states. He announced his plan (“das Zehn-Punkte-Programm”) to the Bundestag in late November 1989. Kohl called for close cooperation between the FRG and GDR in economics, science and technology, culture, the environment, and communications. He called for the countries “to develop confederative structures between both countries in

²⁴ “Follow-up Meeting with Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki of Poland,” March 22, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-03-22--Mazowieck.pdf

²⁵ “Telephone Conversation with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor – Federal Republic of Germany,” November 10, 1989, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1989-11-10--Kohl.pdf

²⁶ “Telephone Call From Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany,” November 17, 1989, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1989-11-17--Kohl.pdf

Germany with the goal of creating a federation. This depends on a legitimate democratic government in the DDR.”²⁷

Gorbachev, in contrast, advocated the restoration of the four-power occupation of Germany and the Allied Control Commission. At the Malta Summit in December 1989, Gorbachev stressed to Bush, “Mr. Kohl is in too much of a hurry on the German question. That is not good.” The Soviet leader wanted to postpone unification. There were two German states, Gorbachev claimed, “mandated by history. So let history decide the outcome.”²⁸ Although Gorbachev was the leader of a new generation of Soviet leaders who did not view the world through the lens of June 1941, he was nevertheless concerned about German unification. Gorbachev may not have been an adult during the “Great Patriotic War,” but divided Germany was one of the most important legacies of the destruction that the Nazis had inflicted on the Soviet Union. It was difficult for the Soviets to give up the most symbolic concession from the conflict.

German unification, however, proceeded much faster than anybody expected. The East German people demanded change.²⁹ After visiting Dresden in December 1989, Kohl dropped “das Zehn-Punkte-Programm” in favor of extending the FRG’s prefabricated institutions into the GDR. Under this plan, Germany would remain in NATO under Article 5. By January 1990 it became clear that the two German states would become one, and Gorbachev sought to place unification in the context of European integration. His vision remained vague and lacked specificity. The Soviet leader declared, “the time

²⁷ Helmut Kohl, “Das Zehn-Punkte-Programm zur Überwindung der Teilung Deutschlands und Europas vom 28. November 1989,” in *Kohl: Deutschlands Zukunft in Europa: Reden und Beiträge des Bundeskanzlers*, ed. Heinrich Seewald (Herford: Busse Seewald, 1990), 118.

²⁸ “First Restricted Bilateral Session with Chairman Gorbachev of Soviet Union,” December 2, 1989, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1989-12-02-Gorbachev%20Malta%20First%20Restricted%20Bilateral.pdf.

²⁹ The March 1990 elections proved this unequivocally to any doubters.

has come to think about replacing military blocs with a system of collective security and cooperation bodies, taking into account the emergence of a united Germany in the centre of Europe. We should orient ourselves towards Helsinki-2, which could become a watershed between the two epochs in international relations.”³⁰ He considered German unification as the opportunity to transform the international system and create a post-Cold War order free of Cold War organizations like NATO and WTO.

Gorbachev’s plan for German unification was based on his “new thinking” in foreign policy. Upon entering office in March 1985, Gorbachev signaled that he wanted to lower Cold War tensions and change the way the Soviets would interact with its Eastern European satellites. He sought to overcome the Cold War division of Europe, and bring the Soviet Union into the “common European home.” Gorbachev described, “The home is common, that is true, but each family has its own apartment, and there are different entrances, too. But it is only together, collectively, and by following the sensible norms of coexistence that the Europeans can save their home.”³¹ Europe, from the “Atlantic to the Urals,” shared common history and culture, “united by the common heritage of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, of the great philosophical and social teachings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” Gorbachev noted, however, that Germany should not be reunited. There were two separate German states grounded in international law, and “any realistically-minded politician can be guided only by this and this alone.”³² By January 1990, however, Gorbachev had to face the reality that German

³⁰ Михаил Сергеевич Горбачёв, *Собрание Сочинений*, том 19, 64

³¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 195.

³² *Ibid.*, 201.

unification was coming sooner rather than later. His inchoate plan depended on an expanded role for the CSCE to replace Cold War institutions such as NATO and WTO.

The Bush Administration Rejects A Central Role for the CSCE

Interests drove American foreign policy during the end of the Cold War. Bush supported Kohl's plan because it would achieve American goals for German unification. Most importantly, the United States wanted to ensure that Germany remained in NATO. The survival of NATO would also guarantee that the United States would remain in Europe to protect its military and political interests. The United States wanted to respect German self-determination, but needed to ensure that the Germans would choose to remain in NATO. As it became increasingly clear that Kohl and the Germans would select NATO, the Bush administration championed German self-determination with more vigor.

Bush wanted a settlement that did not make the West vulnerable. Despite Gorbachev's conciliatory rhetoric, Bush continued to view Moscow through a Cold War lens. He did not trust the Soviets. Bush, like Reagan, supported and welcomed Gorbachev's domestic initiatives *perestroika* and *glasnost*, and his initiative to reduce superpower tensions. Yet Bush was more skeptical than his predecessor about Gorbachev's chance for success. When Gorbachev came to power in March 1985, Bush (then Vice President) had measured expectations of the new Soviet leader. He was optimistic that Gorbachev might "be better to work with," but wrote that he could "just see some of our members of Congress eating out of his hand in wishful anticipation of achieving détente but giving away too much in the process as we try to figure out who

this man really is.”³³ As president, Bush recognized that the Soviet Union, despite Gorbachev’s conciliatory rhetoric, remained a powerful empire with the ability to counter American interests.

Bush articulated his approach to relations with the Soviet Union in May 1989 at the Texas A&M University commencement ceremony. He announced that the United States wished to move past its Cold War foreign policy of containment and integrate the Soviet Union into the “community of nations.” The achievement of this goal, however, depended on visible change in the Soviet Union. Bush declared,

“The Soviet Union says that it seeks to make peace with the world and criticizes its own postwar policies. These are words that we can only applaud, but a new relationship cannot simply be declared by Moscow or bestowed by others; it must be earned. It must be earned because promises are never enough.”³⁴

In order for the Soviet Union to prove that it was worthy to rejoin the international system, Bush said, the superpower had to reduce its armed forces; support self-determination, political pluralism, and human rights both at home and abroad; cooperate with the West to find peaceful solutions to regional disputes around the globe; and finally address the criminal international drug trade and dangers to the environment. The Soviets could normalize relations with the West, but such a change in relations was dependent solely on the Soviets. In September 1989, the Bush administration stated in National Security Directive 23 that American foreign policy must “be vigilant, recognizing that the Soviet Union is still government by authoritarian methods and that its powerful armed forces

³³ Bush to Reagan, March 13, 1985, in George H.W. Bush, *All the Best: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 344.

³⁴ “Remarks at the Texas A&M University Commencement Ceremony in College Station,” May, 12, 1989, PPP.

remain a threat to our security and that of our allies.”³⁵

Bush surrounded himself with foreign policy advisers and Cabinet members of a similar mind. Although they supported Gorbachev’s initiatives, American policymakers doubted to varying degrees whether Gorbachev would be successful. As Gates remembers, “Everyone, from Bush on down, was skeptical about Gorbachev’s chances for success in reforming the Soviet system.... There was no disagreement about continuing Soviet military power or Gorbachev’s ability politically to complicate our lives with the allies and others when it served his purposes.”³⁶ James A. Baker III, whom Bush selected to succeed George Schultz as Secretary of State, shared Bush’s hopeful yet skeptical interpretation of reform in the Soviet Union.³⁷ During his confirmation hearing in January 1989, Baker stressed that there were “very real changes” going on in the Soviet Union, but “realism requires that we be prudent.” The Soviet Union remained a heavily armed superpower, Baker said. Moscow’s rhetoric might have become more conciliatory, “but the force structure and politics that support far-reaching interests and clients have not changed commensurately. Many of these politics and those clients are hostile to American values, and they threaten our interest and our allies. That is a reality.”³⁸ The United States should proceed with caution and realism, Baker stressed, because “the jury is still out” on the consequences of Gorbachev’s reforms. There was a

³⁵ “National Security Directive 23: U.S. Relations with the Soviet Union,” September 22, 1989, National Security Directives, Bush Library. <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/nsd/nsd23.pdf>.

³⁶ Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 474.

³⁷ Bush and Baker had been friends for more than 35 years at the time of Baker’s appointment. Although Bush never admitted it, Baker believes that the president was instrumental in getting Baker his first government job as under secretary of commerce in the Ford administration.

³⁸ Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Nomination of James A. Baker III*, 16.

window of opportunity, “but we really should not at this stage, I do not think, take it for granted that [normalized relations will] be the course.”³⁹

History reinforced the Bush administration’s skepticism. The president and several of his key advisers and Cabinet members were veterans of the Ford administration with memories of the collapse of détente in the late 1970s.⁴⁰ Bush had been the director of the CIA, Baker was the Under Secretary of Commerce, Scowcroft was the National Security Adviser, and Dick Cheney was the White House Chief of Staff. More amicable relations in international affairs under détente had given way to renewed Cold War in the late 1970s. In May 1989, Bush reminded the country, “the Soviet Union has promised a more cooperative relationship before, only to reverse course and return to militarism. Soviet foreign policy has been almost seasonal: warmth before cold, thaw before freeze. We seek a friendship that knows no season of suspicion, no chill of distrust.”⁴¹

The end of the “Khrushchev Thaw” in the early 1960s provided American policymakers with another analogy. Although Khrushchev introduced sweeping cultural and political reforms in the Soviet Union, he was ousted from power in 1964, and his successor Leonid Brezhnev reversed many of Khrushchev’s changes. Former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger warned “we must never forget that Mr. Gorbachev...could have a very limited term of political leadership if he continues to

³⁹ Ibid, 83.

⁴⁰ When the issue of memory is brought up in the literature of the Cold War, it is often in the context of how the memory of the Second World War affected international relations and security concerns. For American policymakers at the end of the Cold War, however, the memory of German aggression was not the only thing on their minds. They were also mindful of the ebbs and flows of Soviet conciliatory policies. The end of the Khrushchev Thaw and the collapse of détente provided analogies to Gorbachev’s reforms for many skeptical American policymakers.

⁴¹ “Remarks at the Texas A&M University Commencement Ceremony in College Station,” May, 12, 1989, *PPP*.

displease the Soviet military or the majority of the Soviet leadership. We should recall that another Soviet general secretary, Mr. Khrushchev, preached and tried many of the same reforms and was ousted.”⁴² Richard Hermann, a member of the Policy Planning Committee at the State Department, remembered that everybody believed “Gorbachev’s for real, but given he is for real, can he in fact be successful? Or is what he is proposing to do impossible? And will he be blocked by other forces in the Soviet Union?”⁴³ The Bush administration believed that the changes in Eastern Europe would last, but was not convinced that changes in the Soviet Union would endure. In March 1990 Bush told Mazowiecki, “we see irreversibility in Poland and Czechoslovakia, but not in the Soviet Union.”⁴⁴

NATO was critical to maintaining the American presence in Europe. “Instability,” Bush officials often said, was the greatest enemy. Europe and the Soviet Union were undergoing a radical transformation, and there had not been as much chaos in the European international system since the end of the Second World War. To counter instability, the Bush administration believed that it had to retain a strong presence on the Continent. He told Kohl, “We are going to stay involved in Europe. We have some pressure here to lower the level of US troops and defense spending. We are being asked: who is the enemy? The enemy is unpredictability, apathy, and destabilization.”⁴⁵ Dobbins agreed, stating,

⁴² Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 430.

⁴³ “Dialogue: The Musgrove Conference, May1-3, 1998,” in *Masterpieces of History*, 197.

⁴⁴ “Meeting with Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki of Poland,” March 21, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-03-21--Mazowiecki%20\[1\].pdf](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-03-21--Mazowiecki%20[1].pdf)

⁴⁵ “Meeting with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany,” February 24, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-02-24--Kohl.pdf.

“the transformation of the European security landscape includes dangers, some of which are unforeseeable. Security and stability are required for that transition as the old regimes are swept away in Eastern Europe and new democratic institutions and market economics grow strong enough to take their place. NATO can provide the requisite military and political stability.”⁴⁶

As Engel argues, Bush believed that history had proven that Europe was incapable of maintaining peace without an American presence. “Twice in the twentieth Europeans had plunged the world into war. Twice American were drawn in. Twice American contributions proved decisive.”⁴⁷ Thus, the United States needed to serve as the guarantor of peace in Europe. Bush concluded, “the CSCE cannot replace NATO as the core of the West’s deterrent strategy in Europe and as the fundamental justification for U.S. troops in Europe. If that happens, we will have a real problem.”⁴⁸

NATO officials also considered the CSCE insufficient to take on an expanded security role. General Secretary Manfred Wörner stressed that Germany must not be neutral. In February 1990 he told Bush “We must avoid the classical German temptation: to float freely and bargain with both East and West. ...I want to protect the Germans from temptation, Europe from instability, and safeguard those elements that have made a new Europe possible.” Wörner agreed with Bush that the Soviet Union maintained a strong military and power that Europe could not match. “If NATO goes, Europe will not be able to match Soviet power.” The CSCE could not provide the necessary security to combat the Soviets and anchor Germany because the CSCE was “all talk.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Future of NATO*, 6.

⁴⁷ Engel, “Bush, Germany, and the Power of Time,” 652.

⁴⁸ “Meeting with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany,” February 25, 1990.

⁴⁹ “Meeting with Manfred Woerner, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,” February 24, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library.
http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-02-24--Woerner.pdf.

The CSCE also would not satisfy the security concerns of Germany's European neighbors. While the Bush administration was concerned about instability in the Soviet Union (and Europe more broadly), Europeans were more concerned about Germany. Indeed, few in Europe were in favor of unification. Kohl described Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the British as "rather reticent" about unification. Bush responded, "That is the understatement of the year."⁵⁰ The British were wary of moving too quickly. It seemed to Thatcher that a "truly democratic East Germany would soon emerge and that the question of unification was a separate one, on which the wishes and interests of Germany's neighbours and other powers must be fully taken into account."⁵¹ France took a similar position. Mitterrand told Gorbachev shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall that he did "not think that the issue of changing borders can realistically be raised now – at least until a certain time.... There is a certain equilibrium that exists in Europe, and we should not disturb it."⁵² Poland was particularly concerned about the integrity of its western border with Germany, established after the Second World War. Mazowiecki told Bush, "it is crucial to us to insure that our western territories are not just a gift from Stalin – that they are guaranteed by all the powers, not just in a unilateral act by one.... we fear a sense of strength of a new Germany."⁵³ Furthermore, the Europeans, some more quickly than others, came to believe that NATO could offer security against a resurgent Germany.

⁵⁰ "Meeting with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany," December 3, 1989, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1989-12-03-Kohl.pdf.

⁵¹ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years: 1979-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 792.

⁵² "Document No. 104: Record of Telephone Conversation Between Mikhail Gorbachev and François Mitterrand, November 14, 1989," in *Masterpieces of History*, 594.

⁵³ "Meeting with Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki of Poland," March 21, 1990.

There was no international pressure forcing Bush to act in favor of the CSCE. Indeed, international opinion favored the Americans. It is striking to see in the documents how clearly Bush perceived that conditions in the international system were moving in favor of the West, and he constantly made comments to this effect. Scowcroft recalls conversations with Bush in which they commented on “how fortunate it was that we were on the right side of history in what we were doing. We were not bucking a tide.”⁵⁴ After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Bush wrote in his diary, “We have been criticized here for not jumping on top of the Wall and cheering, but things are moving in freedom’s way.”⁵⁵ Gorbachev repeatedly declared that Germany’s membership in NATO was unacceptable. “It is,” Gorbachev told Soviet and German journalists in March 1990, “absolutely ruled out.”⁵⁶ Bush clearly, however, believed that the course of history had mandated his goals. In an outburst to Kohl, he declared “...the Soviets are not in a position to dictate Germany’s relationship with NATO. What worries me is talk that Germany must not stay in NATO. To hell with that. We prevailed and they didn’t. We can’t let the Soviets clutch victory from the jaws of defeat.”⁵⁷ Kohl agreed, believing “we can win that point in negotiations.”⁵⁸

Because the Bush administration recognized that the ideological trajectory in Central and Eastern Europe favored American values, it did not want to have the issue of

⁵⁴ Brent Scowcroft Interview, Miller Center, University of Virginia, George H.W. Bush Presidential Oral History Project University of Virginia, November 12–13, 1999.

⁵⁵ “Meeting with Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher of the Federal Republic of Germany,” November 11, 1989, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1989-11-21--Genscher.pdf.

⁵⁶ “President Gorbachev Interview to Soviet and German Journalists, March 6, 1990, in *Documents on the End of the Cold War*, 507. See also Горбачёв, *Собрание Сочинений*, том 19, 64.

⁵⁷ “Meeting with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany,” February 25, 1990.

⁵⁸ “Telephone Call from Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany,” February 13, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-02-13--Kohl%20\[1\].pdf](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-02-13--Kohl%20[1].pdf)

German unification decided in an open forum. The CSCE ruled by consensus, and smaller European countries would have played larger roles than the United States wished. Brent Scowcroft remembers, “CSCE, with its consensus procedures, allowed any country uneasy with the prospect of a large Germany much greater potential to stall or delay. A CSCE summit to ratify a unification agreement could develop into a peace conference on Germany, opening up old wounds and unresolved disputes.”⁵⁹ Although Bush favored a strengthened CSCE process, he did “not want the CSCE Summit to be centered on Germany, or to be a meeting which tries to undermine Germany’s full membership in NATO.”⁶⁰

It was not even clear what German unification would look like if the CSCE took the lead role. Baker observed, “Soviet thinking seems still to be in flux and characterized by many internal contradictions....It is not clear what Gorbachev’s ideas mean in practice.”⁶¹ Indeed, Bush believed that Gorbachev’s opposition to Germany’s membership in NATO was directed at NATO as it was at Germany. Bush reported to Kohl, Gorbachev “wasn’t clear on what these [CSCE] structures might look like – [he] was much more focused on getting through the transition. I had the sense that he was still feeling his way and that his position is not totally fixed.”⁶²

On the international level, NATO was the key to unification for the United States. It was not “ideological messianism,” as Zubok suggests, that convinced Bush to counter Gorbachev’s plan. There were real, substantive liabilities about using the CSCE in such a

⁵⁹ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 236.

⁶⁰ “Meeting with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany,” February 25, 1990.

⁶¹ Memorandum, Baker to all diplomatic posts, May 1990, State Department Virtual Reading Room, <http://foia.state.gov/Search/Search.aspx>.

⁶² “Telephone Call to Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Federal Republic of Germany,” June 1, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-06-01-Kohl.pdf.

prominent role. It was an untested organization, and the realist Bush administration refused to test it in the context of the Cold War.

Using the CSCE and the Helsinki Principle as Tools to Achieve Unification

The Bush administration nevertheless envisioned that the CSCE would play a role in unification. As Dobbins noted, German unification had to be completed by satisfying each level of the concentric circles. Wörner observed, “The three key elements of the European architecture are the Alliance [NATO], the process of European integration and the CSCE. Each has its own purpose but complements the others.”⁶³ Kohl said to Bush and Baker, “When the Two Plus Four talks are concluded, the CSCE would bless whatever is concluded.” Baker replied, “Exactly.”⁶⁴ CSCE approval was important because it would offer the settlement symbolic international legitimacy.

The Bush administration always publicly supported self-determination for the Germans. At the NATO summit in Brussels in December 1989, for example, Bush declared that in the process of German unification, “self-determination must be pursued without prejudice to its outcome.” The president was not, however, willing to acknowledge that the Germans could choose their own security organization. He said, “unification should occur in the context of Germany’s continued commitment to NATO.”⁶⁵ The Bush administration’s thinking about the usefulness of the Helsinki Final Act was dynamic. The first priority was to ensure that Germany joined in NATO; the Bush administration was careful not to push the applicability of the Final Act to

⁶³ Manfred Wörner, “Final Communique,” December 1990, available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23690.htm?selectedLocale=en.

⁶⁴ “Meeting with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany,” February 24, 1990.

⁶⁵ “Outline of Remarks at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Headquarters in Brussels,” December 4, 1989, *PPP*.

Germany's right to choose an alliance until it was clear that the Germans would select NATO. Bush came to trust Kohl, who stressed repeatedly that he favored German membership in NATO.

While the Bush administration came to trust the chancellor, it was skeptical about other FRG politicians, particularly Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher. In a speech in late January 1990 at the Tutzing Protestant Academy, Genscher outlined a path to unification that relied heavily on the CSCE and left ambiguous the GDR's relationship with NATO.⁶⁶ Genscher declared, "what NATO must do is state unequivocally that whatever happens in the Warsaw Pact there will be no expansion of NATO territory eastwards..."⁶⁷ As he said to former Maryland Senator Charles Mathias, "to think that the borders of NATO could be moved 300 kilometers eastward, via German unification, would be an illusion... No reasonable person could expect the Soviet Union to accept such an outcome."⁶⁸ The Bush administration was concerned about Genscher's speech, specifically the section about an expanded role for the CSCE in unification. Scowcroft remembers, "given the existing practical problems and the very nature of the CSCE, there was no way we could accept that group absorbing NATO and its functions. Genscher had not made clear just what NATO's relationship to the territory of the GDR would be..."⁶⁹ In May 1990, Genscher supported the Soviet initiative to decouple internal and external aspects of German unification. Kohl, who wanted to provide a

⁶⁶ The debate about the West's alleged promise to Gorbachev that NATO would not expand into Eastern Europe is a related topic, but outside the scope of this paper. For the two extremes of the debate, see Mark Kramer, "The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia." *The Washington Quarterly* 32(2) (2009): 39-61; and Michael MccGwire, "NATO Expansion: 'A Policy Error of Historic Importance,'" *Review of International Studies* 24(1) (1998): 26-39.

⁶⁷ "Speech by Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, at a Conference of the Tutzing Protestant Academy," January 31, 1990, in *Documents on the End of the Cold War*, 440.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, 175.

⁶⁹ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 236-37.

unified front of solidarity with the American position, was upset with Genscher's statements. As Zelikow and Rice note, "Kohl told Genscher that he had no time to be constantly straightening out problems caused by his foreign minister."⁷⁰

It became clear by May 1990 that the Germans would choose to remain in NATO. Kohl, annoyed by Genscher's comments, reassured Bush that "all Germans want to remain in NATO with U.S. forces remaining...there is no substitute for NATO....You must know – as I know – who has helped us. Bush is a very lucky thing for us."⁷¹ Bush stressed to Kohl and Genscher that the West must provide a common front to the Soviets. He told the West Germans, "One thing is certain: it is essential that we have this common view of NATO. The Soviets should not be allowed to expand the Two Plus Four to solve their security problems." Regarding the compatibility of the West German position with the president's, Kohl replied, "There are no problems."⁷² At the subsequent press conference, Kohl declared, "A united Germany will remain a member of the North Atlantic alliance."⁷³

After some initial disagreement, the West was thus able to provide a united front. The difficult part was convincing the Soviets to acquiesce. The breakthrough came in late May and early June 1990 at the Washington summit. The development was unexpected. Before the summit Bush told Kohl, "on the German Question, as it is called, I don't

⁷⁰ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, 253.

⁷¹ "Meeting with Chancellor Kohl, Federal Republic of Germany," May 17, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-05-17--Kohl%20\[1\].pdf](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-05-17--Kohl%20[1].pdf).

⁷² "Meeting with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany," May 17, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-05-17--Kohl%20\[2\].pdf](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-05-17--Kohl%20[2].pdf).

⁷³ "Remarks Following Discussions With Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Federal Republic of Germany," May 17, 1990, *PPP*.

expect much breakthrough.”⁷⁴ Baker had met with Gorbachev in mid May in Moscow, and Gorbachev declared repeatedly that a unified Germany in NATO was unacceptable to the Soviet Union. Gorbachev told Baker that the American “problem was that we banked everything on one premise: namely, that Germany would want to stay in NATO. What if after a short time, it chose to get out – something that could happen. What then, he asked?”⁷⁵ American officials expected to hear more of the same from Gorbachev. The Soviet leader vacillated on his position about Germany’s external orientation. Gorbachev knew that Germany could not be independent, but at various times said that Germany should be “neutral,” belong to the CSCE, or even belong in both NATO *and* the Warsaw Pact.

The Bush administration employed the Helsinki Final Act to convince the Soviets to accept Germany in NATO. In a theme paper written in preparation for the Washington summit, the State Department laid out various talking points. The American position, the paper stated, was that Germany should be able to choose its own security organization. “It is assured by the first principle of the Helsinki Final Act. Both German governments have stated that they wanted a unified Germany to be in NATO.”⁷⁶ The Helsinki Conference established an international norm that all signatories were expected to respect. The Bush administration planned to use this norm as a tool to ensure that the West had the better position in world opinion.

To the surprise of everybody (Americans *and* Soviets) involved in the summit, on

⁷⁴ “Telephone Call from Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Federal Republic of Germany,” May 30, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-05-30-Kohl.pdf.

⁷⁵ Memorandum, Baker to Bush, May 18, 1990, Department of State Virtual Reading Room. <http://foia.state.gov/Search/Search.aspx>.

⁷⁶ Theme Paper, State Department, May 23, 1990, Department of State Virtual Reading Room. <http://foia.state.gov/Search/Search.aspx>.

June 1, 1990 Gorbachev acknowledged that Germany had the right to choose its own military alliance. The Soviet leader answered a direct question from Bush to that effect, and “the Americans were startled.”⁷⁷ Encouraged by his advisers, Bush again asked Gorbachev, and again Gorbachev answered in the affirmative. The Soviet delegation was furious. Gates remembers that when Gorbachev agreed, he thought,

[Soviet adviser Sergey] Akhromeyev was going to have a stroke. And all these guys are looking at each other and Gorbachev is kind of oblivious to the hubbub on his side, that all these guys are sort of falling out of their chairs and so on, figuratively speaking. We all knew something terribly important had happened and Brent, as I recall, wrote the President a note that sort of said, “Get him to say it again.” And he said it again. Then there was a recess and everybody went out and I’m sure the entire Soviet side beat up on Gorbachev, “What have you done?” and so on...But it was one of those instances when everybody at the table knew a huge threshold had been crossed. I think there was a general feeling on our side that Gorbachev probably didn’t appreciate just how big a threshold had been crossed, but once he said it, his pride prevented him from walking back from it.⁷⁸

The big moment had arrived; the Bush administration had caught Gorbachev in his contradiction. As Scowcroft remembers, “Once he acknowledged that countries had the right to select their own alliances, he had cut the ground out from under the Soviet position.... Gorbachev had taken a step from which there was no retreat.”⁷⁹ “In the end,” Gorbachev remembers, “we managed to find a formula on which we could both agree: a united Germany... would decide for itself which alliance to join.”⁸⁰

The two sides did not agree to any particulars, but the critical hurdle had been overcome. The president told the press on June 3, 1990, “On the matter of Germany's external alliances, I believe, as do Chancellor Kohl and members of the alliance, that the

⁷⁷ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, 277.

⁷⁸ Gates Interview, Miller Center, July 23-24, 2000.

⁷⁹ Scowcroft Interview, Miller Center, November 12-13, 1999.

⁸⁰ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), 689.

united Germany should be a full member of NATO. President Gorbachev, frankly, does not hold that view. But we are in full agreement that the matter of alliance membership is, in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act, a matter for the Germans to decide.”⁸¹ Later that afternoon, Bush called Kohl to inform him of the development. Bush read part of the press conference to Kohl and said, “that was in front of the whole world press, and Gorbachev didn’t object when I read that last sentence.” Bush had sent his press statement to Soviet ambassador Alexander Bessmertnykh the night before, and “he came back before the press conference to say the Soviet side had no objections.”⁸²

Gorbachev may have accepted in principle to the applicability of the Final Act, but Bush acknowledged, “we still have a lot of work to do.”⁸³ The Bush administration tried to make German integration into NATO an easier pill to swallow for the Soviets. Bush not only promised that NATO would reform to become more political in nature, he also assured Gorbachev that the CSCE would have an expanded role in future European affairs. This would increase Soviet participation in European politics and anchor Germany in yet another organization; this one a pan-European community with Soviet and Eastern European representation. “A commitment to strengthen the CSCE process could help reassure the Soviet Union that it would be a participant in future European security discussions.”⁸⁴ Many scholars point to reformation of NATO as an important piece of “securing building permits” for German unification. They do not, however,

⁸¹ “News Conference of President Bush and President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union,” June 3, 1990, *PPP*.

⁸² “Telephone Call to Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Federal Republic of Germany,” June 3, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-06-03-Kohl.pdf.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Stanley R. Sloan, Document 66 “The United States and a New Europe: Strategy for the Future,” in *The Helsinki Process and the Reintegration of Europe 1986-1991, Analysis and Documentation*, ed. Vojtech Mastny (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 211.

sufficiently show that an expanded role for CSCE was a component of “bribing” Gorbachev out of Germany.⁸⁵

The Bush administration planned to change the character of NATO and announce an expanded role for the CSCE at the NATO Summit in July 1990 in London. Before the conference, Bush called various heads of state to ensure that they were all on the same page. He told Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, “the [NATO] Summit will be crucial for the Soviets. They will have to see something to agree with to go along with Germany in NATO.”⁸⁶ To Belgian Prime Minister Wilfried Martens, Bush stressed, “We have got to show the alliance can adapt.”⁸⁷ The president expressed confidence that the changes in NATO’s orientation would have the desired effect.

The participants also called for an increased role for the CSCE in shaping Europe’s future. The declaration stated, “The CSCE should become more prominent in Europe’s future, bringing together the countries of Europe and North America. We support a CSCE Summit later this year in Paris which would include the signature of a CFE agreement and would set new standards for the establishment, and preservation, of free societies.”⁸⁸ Most importantly, the London Declaration addressed German unification. The allies called for a conclusion of the Two Plus Four talks *before* the CSCE summit. NATO did not want the rank and file members of the CSCE to receive a voice in how German unification would be conducted. “It is the hope of the Allies that the “2 + 4”

⁸⁵ Christopher Maynard, for example, barely mentions the CSCE in his chapter on German unification. See Maynard, *Out of the Shadow: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 53-74.

⁸⁶ “Telephone Call to Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers of the Netherlands,” July 3, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-07-03--Lubbers.pdf.

⁸⁷ “Telephone Call to Prime Minister Wilfried Martens of Belgium,” July 3, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-07-03--Martens.pdf.

⁸⁸ “Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance,” July 1990, available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23693.htm?selectedLocale=en.

process will be completed prior to the CSCE Summit. That Summit will help consolidate the changes that have taken place in Central and Eastern Europe, and provide substantial new impetus to the CSCE process in all main areas of the Helsinki Final Act.”⁸⁹ It was unclear exactly what form an expanded CSCE would take, but it was intended to convince Gorbachev that the Soviet Union would become more tightly integrated into Europe.

The purpose of the London Declaration was to make Gorbachev more comfortable. Bush told Gorbachev in July that in the declaration, “we conveyed the idea of an expanded, stronger CSCE with new institutions in which the USSR can share and be part of the new Europe.” Gorbachev was receptive to the changes, informing Bush “the development of this process make[s] us hopeful that positive results will be achieved in Vienna and on the CSCE process and that there are good prospects for the CSCE meeting we have discussed.”⁹⁰ Thus, it was the combined NATO reforms and expansion of the CSCE that made a unified Germany in the Atlantic alliance less threatening to Gorbachev.

The Bush administration couched unification in terms of the principles of the Final Act. In October 1990, Bush announced that the changes in Eastern Europe and Germany are a “testimony to the power of the principles in the founding charter of the CSCE, the Helsinki Final Act. There, in the human rights and fundamental freedoms set down in Helsinki 15 years ago, we find the cause and catalyst of what I refer to as the

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ “Telcon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union,” July 17, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, Bush Library. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-07-17--Gorbachev.pdf.

Revolution of '89.”⁹¹ The unification settlement, “Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany,” was couched in Helsinki language. It declared the inviolability of the German-Polish border and promoted German self-determination. The treaty stated, “The United Germany shall have accordingly full sovereignty over its internal and external affairs,” according it free reign to choose to join NATO. By presenting unification as a product of CSCE values, the Allies ensured that the settlement would be legitimate in the eyes of the European international community.

The CSCE recognized unification at the Paris Summit in November 1990 under the Charter of Paris.⁹² CSCE recognition of German unification was largely symbolic; for all practical purposes, Germany unified on October 3, 1990. CSCE recognition of the unification was important, however, because the Eastern Europeans collectively had until that point been uninvolved in negotiations. The Charter of Paris for a New Europe, based on the foundation of the Helsinki Accords, reaffirmed the member nations’ commitment to democracy, self-determination, and human rights. It also recognized and welcomed democratic changes in Eastern Europe, and importantly, Germany:

“We note with great satisfaction the Treaty on the Final Settlement with respect to Germany signed in Moscow on 12 September 1990 and sincerely welcome the fact that the German people have united to become one State in accordance with the principles of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and in full accord with their neighbours. The establishment of the national unity of Germany is an important contribution to a just and lasting order of peace for a united, democratic Europe aware of its responsibility for stability, peace and co-operation.”⁹³

The CSCE member states approved the result of German unification with this statement

⁹¹ “Remarks at the Ministerial Meeting in New York, New York, of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe,” October 1, 1990, *PPP*.

⁹² The American agreement to hold a CSCE conference was tied to the Bush administration’s requirement that the Soviets sign the CFE Treaty.

⁹³ “Charter of Paris For A New Europe,” November 1990, available at <http://www.osce.org/mc/39516>.

in the Charter of Paris. Kohl declared, “United German remains committed to the CSCE as the engine behind a pan-European peace policy.”⁹⁴

As promised, Gorbachev received an expanded CSCE role in European international affairs. The Allies knew, “the CSCE Summit is of great importance to the Soviets, which will give impulse to changes in Europe. They want a substitute for an eroding Warsaw Pact.”⁹⁵ The organization created a council of foreign ministers to serve as the main forum for political consultation, a committee of senior officials, a CSCE secretariat, and a conflict prevention Center to reduce the risk of the outbreak of hostilities.

Sarotte argues that NATO paid “lip service” to an expanded role for the CSCE in future European affairs, but it is clear that Gorbachev did not consider it lip service.⁹⁶ In his memoirs, Gorbachev writes proudly of the changes to the CSCE structure in his memoirs. He describes, “the Paris conference heralded a new, post-confrontational era in European history.” The tragedy, Gorbachev, believes, was that “the pan-European process was put to trial even before the newly created mechanisms became fully operational.”⁹⁷

Conclusion

⁹⁴ “Speech by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to the Second Summit of CSCE Heads of State or Government, Paris, 19-21 November 1990,” available at <http://www.osce.org/mc/16153>.

⁹⁵ “Telephone Call to Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Federal Republic of Germany,” June 3, 1990.

⁹⁶ Mary E. Sarotte, “Perpetuating US Preeminence: the 1990 Deals to ‘Bribe the Soviets Out’ and Move NATO In,” *International Security* 35(1) (Summer 2010): 130.

⁹⁷ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 708.

After four decades of Cold War conflict and division, the unification of Germany in the fall of 1990 transformed the balance of power in the international system.⁹⁸ In their memoirs American officials have trumpeted German unification as a tremendous accomplishment in statecraft. President George H.W. Bush described unification as “an astonishingly successful achievement,” while his National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft characterized the negotiations as “personal diplomacy in the finest sense of the term” and “a shepherded victory for peace.”⁹⁹ The American ambassador to Moscow, Jack F. Matlock, Jr., was even more complimentary, predicting “history will regard the negotiations that occurred between March and July 1990 as a model of diplomacy and their outcome as one of the most notable achievements of statesmen – ever.”¹⁰⁰ The Bush administration not only achieved unification on Western terms, but also managed to convince Gorbachev to accept the unthinkable: a unified Germany in NATO. Gorbachev’s acquiescence to German membership in NATO represented a monumental shift in Soviet foreign policy because the question of German power lay at the center of the Cold War. Germany’s full integration into NATO symbolized more than any other event that the Cold War had ended.

The Bush administration achieved its objectives for unification. The process of German unification was conducted outside the CSCE, and the Eastern European countries did not have a voice in the negotiations. The settlement, however, still received the

⁹⁸ Throughout this essay, I refer to the GDR’s absorption into the FRG through Article 23 as “unification.” Scholars use both “unification” and “reunification,” and each term appears in the documents. I prefer unification because the Germany that emerged in October 1990 was a new entity. Historically, Germany never had the particular borders codified in the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany in September 1990.

⁹⁹ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed: The Collapse of the Soviet Empire, the Unification of Germany, Tiananmen Square, and the Gulf War* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1998), 299-300.

¹⁰⁰ Jack F. Matlock, Jr., *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador’s Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Random House, 1995), 387.

international legitimacy that came with the Charter of Paris. It had, as Kohl had told Bush and Baker at Camp David in February 1990, simply “blessed” the settlement. The Bush administration may have allowed for an increased role for the CSCE in European affairs, but NATO did not wither away and Germany remained securely tied to it. The increased role of the CSCE helped “the Soviet Union accept German unity without losing face,” and allowed the Soviets to become more integrated with Europe.¹⁰¹

The outcome of a unified Germany in NATO was in many ways over-determined. Self-determination and democracy constituted a critical component of *perestroika* and Gorbachev’s foreign policy. Gorbachev could not continue to present himself as a champion of “common human problems” if he denied the Germans the right to choose their own security organization. Gorbachev was, as Baker describes, “in the difficult position of having to refute an argument that depended on CSCE principles,” and he eventually accepted the inevitable. More broadly, “the reality of German unification was imposing itself,” and Gorbachev was far too legalistic and logical a thinker to overlook the gaping holes in reasoning that peppered his own argument.”¹⁰² Exactly how the process would unfold, however, depended on the choices of policymakers. As Bush told West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, “We are going to win the game, but we must be clever while we are doing it.”¹⁰³

There remains much to be done in this area of study. As more documents become declassified, the foreign policy of the Bush administration will become more clear and

¹⁰¹ Tom Heneghan, Document 89: “Instead of Sealing German Split, CSCE Helped to Overcome It,” November 15, 1990, in *The Helsinki Process and the Reintegration of Europe*, 263.

¹⁰² Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 253-54.

¹⁰³ “Meeting with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany,” February 25, 1990, Memcons/Telcons, George Bush Presidential Library Website. http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/memcons_telcons/1990-02-25--Kohl.pdf.

nuanced. Several questions remain unanswered. For example, what would Bush have done if the Germans had not chosen to remain in NATO? Would he have supported Germany's right to select its own security organization, or blocked it? Publicly, Bush officials repeatedly said that although it was their preference that Germany belong in NATO, they would respect German self-determination. Privately, however, it appears that German membership in NATO was non-negotiable. As he told Kohl in February 1990, the American objective was continued German presence in NATO, and "we won't move away from that."¹⁰⁴

To a large extent, support of NATO represented American interests and support of the CSCE represented American values. Maintaining an appropriate balance between the pursuit of ideals and interests has been a central problem in American foreign policy. On one hand, policymakers seek to uphold American values, such as self-determination and democracy. On the other hand, they also pursue American economic and military interests in an effort to make the country more prosperous and secure. There were many instances during the Cold War (and before) when interests trumped values. In 1953 the Eisenhower administration assisted in the overthrow of democratically elected President Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran to avoid the nationalization of Iranian resources. For all his allusions to American values throughout his presidency, Reagan supported some of the most brutal dictators in the world, including Saddam Hussein. The United States often did not support its idealism with action, choosing instead a course of action based on threat perception or power.

¹⁰⁴ Telephone Call from Helmut Kohl, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany," February 13, 1990.

With regard to German unification, the Bush administration managed to conduct foreign policy successfully on each level of the concentric circles, thereby insuring an alignment of interest and values. Just as the international community had integrated the FRG in the early Cold War, the power of a united Germany was now to be anchored by close ties with Europe and North America.

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