

**Negotiating with a declining power: The American – Soviet Diplomacy
in the context of German reunification**

Ștefania-Teodora Cocor¹

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Abstract: *The unexpected opening of the Berlin Wall on the evening of November 9, 1989, was a turning point in history, bringing the division of the Cold War to an end. Although the crumbling of the communist bloc seemed almost inevitable in the autumn of 1989, the reunification of Germany was still an outlying goal. But taking advantage of the opportunity that the wall's fall brought, the leaders of that time tried to accelerate history and bring German reunification to a fait accompli. The United States influenced the unification process through its effort to overcome the Allies' suspicion of a reunited Germany and preserve the American role in the future of European and German security. The high-level talks between the United States and the Soviet Union in the period 1989-1990 reveal the shifting distribution of power and the beginning of a new security architecture. Drawing on records of conversations, memoranda of face-to-face and*

¹ Ștefania-Teodora Cocor is currently pursuing her Ph.D studies at the Faculty of History, University of Bucharest. Her main academic interests are the history of the Cold War, Germany after World War Two, U.S. - Russia relations since the Soviet collapse, Foreign Policy Analysis, Public Diplomacy, and the EU Foreign and Security Policy.

telephone conversations, speeches, public statements and memoirs, this paper examines the diplomatic interactions between Washington and Moscow during the process of German reunification. Over the ten months of negotiations, the official objectives of the United States and the Soviet Union were widely opposed. With events slipping out of his control in Eastern Europe and with a weaker political position at home, Mikhail Gorbachev attempted to secure a gradual reunification and a neutral Germany, but the readjustments of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the economic assistance given by the Federal Republic of Germany made the Soviet leader accept the Western terms. The paper aims to discover how the United States and the Soviet Union found ways to cooperate in the final act of the Cold War, what were the motivations and the aims of the main political actors and why the questions raised during that period remain a source of tension and controversy in the relations between the United States and today's Russia.

From competition to cooperation

The downfall of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989 transformed completely the map drawn at the end of the Second World War. The partly peaceful events resulted from the changes of the Soviet system that enabled to hasten the end of the Cold War. Intending to reform the Soviet system, not destroy it, Mikhail Gorbachev implemented a series of changes that had an impact not only domestically, but also on foreign policy. The reforms of *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost* (openness) would be complemented by his "New political thinking" on foreign policy, officially launched in February 1986, during the Twenty-Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. A set of diplomatic principles and

guidelines, the “New political thinking” was based on a few key themes: the fear of nuclear war shared by all peoples, the interdependence of the problems faced by humanity, the “de-ideologization” of international relations, and the end of the principle of class struggle in foreign policy.² Convinced that security must be mutual and international politics could no longer be a zero-sum game, Gorbachev had the aim to reintegrate the Soviet Union into the international system as a trusted partner.

In his historic speech to the United Nations General Assembly, on December 7, 1988, the Soviet leader highlighted the “new thinking” by declaring his intention to make the Soviet Union a responsible international actor. He announced the unilateral reduction of Soviet armed forces from Europe, the extended Soviet Union's participation in the monitoring mechanism on human rights, and the willingness to continue the dialogue with the United States and the newly elected President George H. W. Bush in “a spirit of realism, openness, and goodwill”.³ His strategy represented a dramatic change in Soviet perceptions of the outside world. The significant withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe signalled that the European communist countries were now no longer under the tight control of the Kremlin. He applied a different approach to Europe and inaugurated a new era of détente with the United States.

The new American administration of George H.W. Bush took the reins on January 1989. With great experience in international affairs due to his tenure as ambassador to the United Nations, U.S. envoy to China, head of the CIA in the

² Marie-Pierre Rey, “Gorbachev’s New Thinking and Europe, 1985–1989”, in *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal*, edited by Frederic Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, Leopoldo Nuti, London, Routledge, 2008, p.45

³ “Address by Mikhail Gorbachev at the UN General Assembly Session (Excerpts), December 7, 1988”, in *Woodrow Wilson Center Digital Archive* <https://bit.ly/3o6n1GL>

1970s, and vice president during the Reagan administration, George H.W. Bush seemed to have the most suitable profile for a leader in times of profound shifts on the international scene. In his inaugural address, Bush positioned himself on the threshold of a new era full of opportunities: “The totalitarian era is passing, its old ideas blown away like leaves from an ancient, lifeless tree. A new breeze is blowing, and a nation refreshed by freedom stands ready to push on. There is new ground to be broken and new action to be taken.”⁴ He was hinting at the transformative changes underway in the Soviet bloc and the consequences that these changes would have for the whole world.

In his first telephone conversation with Gorbachev, the American president reassured the Soviet leader that he would continue to improve the bilateral relationship and the policies started by President Ronald Reagan.⁵ He also underscored the importance of the Secretary of State James Baker in building a good working relationship with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze.⁶ James Baker, a close friend of Bush, was considered by the President a “tough trader and a strong negotiator” who would always tell directly and forcefully how he felt on various matters.⁷ Bush wanted very special and trusted people in the key policy posts, so he installed in the administration people that would master all the details and complexities of policy matters. Even though many political leaders and journalists had predicted that the Bush

⁴ “Inaugural Address, 1989-01-20”, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States - George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum* <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/1>

⁵ “President's Telephone Conversation with Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, January 23, 1989”, in *George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum: Memcons and Telcons* <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1989-01-23--Gorbachev.pdf>

⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷ George H.W. Bush, Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, New York, Vintage Books, 1999, p. 45

presidency would be tantamount to Ronald Reagan's third term⁸, the new President made sure to be distinguished both in the appointments he made in his administration and the strategy toward the Soviet Union.

Since George Kennan concluded in 1947 that "the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies"⁹, Washington followed throughout the years of the Cold War the strategy of containment regarding the Soviet Union influence. All the American presidents after Harry S. Truman maintained containment as the basic strategy in U.S. relations with Moscow. But as tensions with Kremlin seemed to be reduced due to Gorbachev's transformative measures, various thinkers believed that a positive response from the United States is needed. The same George Kennan that coined the containment strategy forty years ago declared, during a testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April 1989, that "there have been in recent months and years several interesting and encouraging initiatives and suggestions from the Soviet side to which we have been essentially unresponsive."¹⁰

After informal discussions with several senior foreign policy advisors, George H. W. Bush called for a different strategy. On May 12, 1989, the American President used the commencement speech at Texas A&M University to announce the new policy toward the Soviet Union: "Our review indicates that 40 years of perseverance have brought us a precious opportunity, and it is time to move

⁸ Michael Beschloss, Strobe Talbott, *At The Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War*, New York, Open Road Integrated Media, 1993, p.46

⁹ "X" (George F. Kennan), „The sources of Soviet conduct”, in *Foreign Affairs. An American Quarterly Review*, No 4, Vol. 25., July 1947, New York, Council of Foreign Affairs, p. 566-582 <https://bit.ly/459sZY3>

¹⁰ "Future of U.S.-Soviet Relations", in *C-SPAN*, April 4, 1989 <https://bit.ly/41UjCHb>

beyond containment to a new policy for the 1990s, one that recognizes the full scope of change taking place around the world and in the Soviet Union itself. In sum, the United States now has as its goal much more than simply containing Soviet expansionism. We seek the integration of the Soviet Union into the community of nations."¹¹ "Beyond containment" became the grand theme of the Bush administration's foreign policy.¹² Designed as a positive response to the "new thinking" of Gorbachev, the new strategy described the Bush approach toward the reformist Soviet Union.

The prospects of a more cooperative relationship between the two superpowers were outlined against the backdrop of radical changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The Polish government agreed to negotiate with the once-illegal Solidarity trade union and, by June 1989, Solidarity delivered a crushing electoral victory for the new bicameral legislature. On August 24, 1989, the first non-communist government in postwar Eastern Europe formally took power in Poland. In Hungary, the new prime minister Miklós Németh refused to approve funds for the continued maintenance of the barbed wire along the border between Hungary and Austria.¹³ His decision to open the country's border with the West provided an avenue to escape for a large number of East Germans and marked the true beginning of the end of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The staunch communist leader Erich Honecker resisted reforming East Germany and after anti-government protests erupted in Leipzig, Dresden and

¹¹ "Remarks at the Texas A M University Commencement Ceremony in College Station, 1989-05-12", in *Public Papers of the Presidents...* <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/413>

¹² Don Oberdorfer, "Bush finds theme of foreign policy 'Beyond Containment'", in *The Washington Post*, May 28, 1989 <https://wapo.st/3Wd65ed>

¹³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, New York, The Penguin Press, 2005, pp. 230-231

other major cities, Politburo removed him from office. His successor, Egon Krenz, alongside the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) Politburo, decided to adopt a new travel law meant to relieve the tensions in East Germany. The decree, debated in the typical disarray in which SED Politburo found itself in November 1989, was handed to Günter Schabowski, a Politburo member that was unfamiliar with what the travel law implied. Assigned to brief the press about the new rules, Schabowski declared in front of the journalists that “we have decided today to implement a regulation that allows every citizen of the German Democratic Republic to leave the GDR through any of the border crossings.” Asked when this law would come into effect, Schabowski, almost confused, replied “immediately, without delay”.¹⁴

Within minutes after Schabowski’s announcement, crowds began gathering at the crossing points. On the night of November 9, 1989, after twenty-eight years, the Berlin Wall came down. Just as on August 13, 1961, a city and a people awoke to find themselves divided, so on the morning of November 10, 1989, that division was no more.¹⁵

The West German Factor

The decision by the East German leadership to open the borders was welcomed with excitement by all the people who witnessed the historic event. Gorbachev's foreign affairs adviser, Anatoly Chernyaev, related in his diary the significance of the fall of the Berlin Wall: “The Berlin Wall has collapsed. This

¹⁴ “Günter Schabowski’s Press Conference in the GDR International Press Center 6:53 - 7:01 p.m.”, November 9, 1989, in *Woodrow Wilson Center Digital Archive* <https://bit.ly/438pWO2>

¹⁵ Frederick Taylor, *The Berlin Wall: A World Divided, 1961-1989*, New York, HarperCollins, 2008, p. 455

entire era in the history of the socialist system is over [...] This is the end of Yalta [...] the Stalinist legacy and <<the defeat of Hitlerite Germany>>.”¹⁶ He praised the Soviet leader’s role in ending the post-war order: “That is what Gorbachev has done. And he has indeed turned out to be a great leader. He has sensed the pace of history and helped history to find a natural channel.”¹⁷

The Bush administration tried to respond with caution after the news came in. Although everyone was overwhelmed with euphoria because the collapse of the Wall was truly a freedom victory, Washington was wary about offering hasty comments that might create an incident that would escalate out of control, with a Soviet or East German crackdown.¹⁸ The administration preferred to respond in a way that would not be interpreted as a defeat for the Soviet Union. The prudence of President Bush was sensed by the journalists at the press conference that was organized after the opening of the Wall. Given that the event was a sort of great victory for the American side in the big East-West battle, the President was asked why he doesn’t seem elated. “I am not an emotional kind of guy”, he responded.¹⁹ In a telephone conversation with West-German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the American President shared his worries: “I want to see our

¹⁶ “Document No. 101: Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev regarding the Fall of the Berlin Wall, November 10, 1989”, in *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989*, edited by Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, Vladislav Zubok, Budapest/New York, Central European University Press, 2010, p. 586

¹⁷ *Ibidem*

¹⁸ James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War & Peace, 1989-1992*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995, pp.163-164

¹⁹ “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters on the Relaxation of East German Border Controls, 1989-11-09”, in *Public Papers of the Presidents...* <https://bit.ly/43js3Pc>

people continue to avoid especially hot rhetoric that might by mistake cause a problem.”²⁰

The urge for restraint came also from Gorbachev. On November 11, 1989, the Soviet leader told Kohl that “I hope that you will use your authority, your political weight and influence to keep others within limits that are adequate for the time being and for the requirements of our time.”²¹ He requested the Chancellor to avoid anything that might further threaten the GDR’s existence, including hurried calls for a possible German reunification. This subtle demand showed that although the Soviets had allowed the Wall to fall, they were by no means ready to accept that unification would be the next step.

Since mid-1989, when the reforms in Central and Eastern Europe seemed to be in full swing, the Bush administration began to hint about the reunification of the two German states. On May 31, 1989, recalling Ronald Reagan’s appeal of tearing the Berlin Wall down, President Bush stated in front of the people of Mainz, Germany, that the “wall stands as a monument to the failure of communism. It must come down.” Asserting that the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the United States are “partners in leadership”, the American President highlighted the responsibility that the two states would have at the beginning of a new era when the Cold War division is over. Introducing the language of unity to his German audience, Bush asserted that the West’s goal is a “Europe whole and free”. Moreover, talking about the fate of the communist

²⁰ “Telephone Conversation with Helmut Kohl, Chancellor - Federal Republic of Germany, November 10, 1989”, in *George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum: Memcons and Telcons* <https://bit.ly/3IB1Ljh>

²¹ “Document No. 103: Record of Telephone Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, November 11, 1989”, in *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe...*, p. 591

state, he declared that “we seek self-determination for all of Germany and all of Eastern Europe.”²² His speech set the tone for closer U.S.–RFG cooperation and for the unwavering support that Washington would have been willing to give Bonn in the possible process of German reunification.

But in the weeks following the opening of the Wall, the Bush administration continued to be cautious. The administration concluded that “at the moment neither the people of the GDR nor the government of the FRG is talking about reunification; the emphasis has been on democratization, and this is where we should keep our emphasis as well.”²³ On November 21, 1989, the American President asked the West-German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher if there is a likelihood that the rapidity of change that has come to Eastern Europe will result in an instant demand in Germany for reunification. The foreign minister said that “no one can foresee. In the GDR, at the top of the agenda is freedom, democracy, and free elections.”²⁴

Nonetheless, West Germany’s agenda seemed to be different. On November 28, 1989, Chancellor Helmut Kohl surprised everyone, including his allies and coalition partner, when he presented a Ten-Point Program for Overcoming the Division of Germany and Europe to the *Bundestag*. According to his Program, the first step was closer cooperation between the two German states, followed by the formation of a confederation and finally by the establishment of a federation that was compatible with East-West détente and European

²² “Remarks to the Citizens in Mainz, Federal Republic of Germany, 1989-05-31”, in *Public Papers of the Presidents...* <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/476>

²³ Philip D. Zelikow, Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 113

²⁴ “Meeting with Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher of the Federal Republic of Germany (U), November 21, 1989”, in *George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum: Memcons and Telcons* <https://bit.ly/45zVuyr>

integration.²⁵ Kohl's initiative was meant to give him an upper hand in the internal struggles of West German politics. Chancellor's parliamentary majority rested on an alliance between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), its smaller Bavarian sister party, Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) of the foreign minister Hans Dietrich-Genscher. Thinking about the 1991 federal elections and eager to take the lead on the German question before Genscher, the FDP and the opposition Social Democrats, Kohl was hoping to shape unification policy. Moreover, he wished to prevent the four occupying powers from seizing the diplomatic initiative above the Germans' heads.²⁶

After Kohl's historic speech, the Chancellor and President Bush talked in depth about the internal problems that Gorbachev and the communist regime from Central and Eastern Europe had been facing. Given the situation that was occurring, Kohl estimated that in the GDR would be free elections by the autumn of 1990 or the beginning of 1991. Talking about his Ten-Point-Program, the Chancellor emphasised the importance of acting with reason, caution and in coordination with Washington. Bush assured the West German leader of his support and appreciated the Program and the exposition of the future of Germany.²⁷ As the Malta summit between Bush and Gorbachev was approaching,

²⁵ "Helmut Kohl's Ten-Point Plan for German Unity (November 28, 1989)", in *German History in Documents and Images: One Germany in Europe (1989-2009)* https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=223

²⁶ Kristina Spohr, "Precluded or Precedent-Setting?: The "NATO Enlargement Question" in the Triangular Bonn-Washington-Moscow Diplomacy of 1990–1991", in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Fall 2012), p. 11 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26924149>

²⁷ "Telephone Conversation with Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Federal Republic of Germany (U), November 29, 1989", in *George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum: Memcons and Telcons* <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1989-11-29--Kohl.pdf>

the Chancellor and the American President discussed the possible outcomes of the high-level meeting. Bush indicated that would be no bold proposals.²⁸

At the Malta summit, held on December 2-3 1989, the German issue was only one aspect of the complex U.S. – Soviet agenda. The summit was the first face-to-face conversation between the American President and the Soviet leader since Bush's inauguration in January. Although Washington could have seized the opportunity to turn the summit into the key decision forum on what was happening in Germany and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, the Bush Administration preferred to set out limited goals. Any effort by Washington and Moscow to decide the fate of Europeans without the Europeans at the table risked awakening memories of the Yalta summit at the end of World War II. According to a memo for Secretary of State James Baker prepared before the summit, it was considered that Gorbachev might think that it is time to work with the United States for a neutral and united Germany. But the memo, written by the long-time SALT negotiator and retired Army General Edward Rowny, stated that "it is entirely premature and improper to enter into any such discussions. Free democratic choices in both the GDR and the FRG, together with thorough consultations with our European allies, should guide the future shape of Germany".²⁹ Referring also to arms control, the memo recommended that the U.S. should "focus the discussion on process and not engage on substance."³⁰

Trying to estimate Gorbachev's political thinking regarding Germany, another memo claimed that Gorbachev is likely to note the Soviet opposition to a

²⁸ *Ibidem*

²⁹ "Rowny memo to Baker, November 17, 1989", in *National Security Archive: The Last Superpower Summits*
<https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/22562-document-15-rowny-memo-baker-november-17-1989>

³⁰ *Ibidem*

reunified Germany, “insisting that it can only occur in the context of the creation of a <<common European home>>.” However, given the Kohl proposal, the Soviet leader “might raise the eventual creation of a German confederation – largely economic – or a demilitarized zone down the middle of the two Germanies”. For addressing German and European security, Gorbachev might “float the idea of an all-European conference on security, perhaps in a CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) context.”³¹

Aboard the Soviet cruise ship *Maxim Gorky*, off the coast of Malta, the two superpowers’ leaders engaged in cordial discussions that confirmed the threshold of a brand-new era of U.S.-Soviet relations. After talking about the American attitude toward *perestroika*, economic relations and disarmament issues, they turned to the changes in Eastern Europe and the subject of Germany. Bush admitted that the U.S. had been “shaken by the rapidity of the unfolding changes.” He assured Gorbachev that the American administration is trying to do nothing which would lead to undermining the Soviet leader’s position. Even though Bush was aware of “how delicate and sensitive problem is” the German question for the Soviets, he went on by saying to Gorbachev “that it is impossible to demand of us that we disapprove of German reunification.”³² The Soviet leader said that he agree with the American role in the European problems, but both the USSR and the U.S. should „act—and interact—in an especially

³¹ “Department of State. Information Memorandum to Secretary Baker from Douglas P. Mulholland (INR). “Soviet Thinking on the Eve of Malta.” November 29, 1989”, in *National Security Archive* <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB298/Document%205.pdf>

³² “Notes by A. S. Chernyaev, Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush at Malta Summit, December 2, 1989”, in *Woodrow Wilson Center Digital Archive* <https://bit.ly/43T2qET>

responsible and balanced way in this period when all of Europe is undergoing such dynamic changes.”³³

Concerning Kohl’s Program, Gorbachev expressed his resentment. He considered that the chancellor is “too much in a hurry on the German question.”³⁴ From Gorbachev’s point of view, a reunified Germany would pose a series of challenges and only history should decide how to be confronted: “For example, would a united Germany be outside alliances or with NATO? Answer is premature and we should let it run its natural course...Let history decide what should happen.”³⁵ Suggesting a possible new security architecture in Europe, the Soviet leader stressed that “a Helsinki II Summit to develop new criteria for this new phase would be a good idea.” Furthermore, he even implied that the Warsaw Treaty and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) should be transformed into more political than military organizations.³⁶

Responding to reporters’ questions after the summit, Gorbachev reiterated his concerns about Germany: “Any artificial acceleration of the process would only exacerbate and make it more difficult to change in many European countries [where] those changes are now taking place”³⁷ Even though he seemed to warn about accelerating the process of German reunification, his relaxed demeanour convinced the U.S. that the Soviet leader was malleable on the

³³ *Ibidem*

³⁴ “US Memorandums of Conversation, George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev at Malta Summit, 2-3 December 1989, December 2, 1989”, in *Woodrow Wilson Center Digital Archive* <https://bit.ly/3JaBBV0>

³⁵ *Ibidem*

³⁶ *Ibidem*

³⁷ “Remarks of the President and Soviet Chairman Gorbachev and a Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters in Malta, 1989-12-03”, in *Public Papers of the Presidents...* <https://shorturl.at/zGVX1>

German question.³⁸ After all, he seemed to just oppose a hasty reunification not the reunification of the two German states per se.

Heading to Brussels for a meeting with NATO allies, President Bush was determined to make public the American support for Kohl's Ten-Point Plan and give the chancellor the green light for reunification. At the press conference held on December 4, 1989, Bush outlined the American task to "provide the architecture for continued peaceful change, to end the division of Europe and Germany, to make Europe whole and free"³⁹ Thus, he announced the four points that represent the U.S. position on German reunification: self-determination; unification in the context of Germany's continued commitment to NATO and an increasingly integrated European Community; moves toward unification must be peaceful, gradual, and part of a step-by-step basis; and inviolability of borders must be respected according to the Helsinki Final Act.⁴⁰ Bush also underscored the U.S. will remain a European power, engaged in the future of Europe. President's statement officially opened the debate about German reunification. Since then, Germany would become a main subject in both private and public debates between the United States and the Soviet Union.

United States' remarks triggered the first comprehensive Soviet policy statement on the German question. During a speech to the Political Committee of the European Parliament in Strasbourg on December 19, Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze declared that a push for reunification would risk

³⁸ Philip D. Zelikow, Condoleezza Rice, *op.cit.*, p. 130

³⁹"The President's News Conference in Brussels, 1989-12-04", in *Public Papers of the Presidents...* <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/1298>

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*

“destabilization in Europe.”⁴¹ But in an unprecedented visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels, Shevardnadze suggested that Moscow would agree on reunification only if West Germany accept demilitarization and adopt a neutral status.⁴² The Soviet foreign minister appeared to rule out unification while at the same time posing questions about how it could occur. His speech seemed to reveal the dilemmas that the Soviet Union was facing at that moment.

By the end of December 1989, the GDR and the USSR were the only Warsaw Pact states that still had Communist governments. In East Germany, mass demonstrations continued even after Egon Krenz resigned and the reformist Prime Minister Hans Modrow was now fully in charge. Protesters expressed their demands for political liberalization, open borders and German unification. GDR was on the verge of collapse as the calls for a reunited Germany became more strident. On January 25, 1990, Gorbachev had an ad-hoc meeting with his closest foreign affairs advisers for discussing the German problem. They agreed that the process of German unification cannot be stopped and recognized that the GDR “is not a real state anymore”.⁴³ Their strategy was that the Soviet Union must be present in the process. For coming to an agreement on the German question, the Soviets proposed a meeting of the “six: the U.S., Britain, France, the USSR, plus Kohl and Modrow, the winners and the losers of the

⁴¹ Tyler Marshall, “Turmoil in the East Bloc: Shevardnadze Calls at NATO, Warns Against Reunification: Diplomacy: The Soviet foreign minister says those pushing for one Germany endanger European stability”, in *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1989 <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-12-20-mn-628-story.html>

⁴² R.C. Longworth, “Shrvardnadze Visits NATO, Urges Caution on German Unity”, in *Chicago Tribune*, December 20, 1989 <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1989-12-20-8903190523-story.html>

⁴³ “Document No. 118: Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev regarding German Reunification, January 28, 1990”, in *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe...*, pp. 673-674

war.”⁴⁴ With the Soviets acknowledging the inevitability of reunification, a fundamental change in Moscow’s position toward Germany was marked.

The discussions about NATO’s future in a reunified Germany

The reunification of the two states, which was already inevitable at the beginning of 1990, sparked a debate over what role would NATO have in the future of a united Germany and an undivided Europe. A united Germany should remain part of NATO or avoid all alliances and become neutral? With the Soviet Union still holding its legal rights as one of the four occupying powers, Moscow’s requests could not be ignored. The negotiations that occurred in early February 1990 between the United States and the Soviet Union about NATO’s role in Germany were essential for defining the prospects of the reunification process and European security in the post-Cold War era.

First American proposals for the future of NATO in a reunited Germany originated in German thinking. On 31 January 1990, RFG’s foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher expressed his vision of a united Germany and its place within a new European architecture. In his speech given at Tutzing, Bavaria, the foreign minister declared that the process of German reunification would occur in a European context, including eventually, membership of a united Germany in both NATO and the European Community. Therefore, he was opposed to a neutral reunified Germany. Out of the desire to appease the possible disapproval of the Soviets for reunification, Genscher addressed the NATO expansion in the former Warsaw Pact territory of East Germany. In his vision, any attempt to extend “NATO military structures to the territory of today’s GDR would block German unity”. In order not to undermine the security interests of the Soviet

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*

Union, „NATO should rule out an expansion of its territory towards the east, moving it closer to the Soviet border“, according to the West German foreign minister.⁴⁵

Genscher's ideas would have an echo in the United States. During a visit to Washington on February 2, 1990, the West German foreign minister talked with Secretary of State James Baker about the vision outlined at Tutzing. In the press conference assembled after the meeting, both of them were in full agreement that reunification would not involve the extension of NATO to the East.⁴⁶ The American Secretary of State seemed to be convinced that this concession would be made Soviets to agree with Germany's reunification in NATO. A few days later, in a conversation with British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd, Genscher clarified what an expansion of NATO territory toward the East means. According to a British memorandum, "when he [Genscher] talked about not wanting to extend NATO that applied to other states besides the GDR. The Russians must have some assurance that if, for example, the Polish Government left the Warsaw Pact one day, they would not join NATO the next."⁴⁷ Genscher thought not only about the future of NATO in Germany but also in Eastern Europe.

⁴⁵ "U.S. Embassy Bonn Confidential Cable to Secretary of State on the speech of the German Foreign Minister: Genscher Outlines His Vision of a New European Architecture, February 1, 1990", in *National Security Archive - NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard* <https://shorturl.at/bLQSY>

⁴⁶ "Sir A.Acland (Washington) to Mr Hurd. No. 295 Telegraphic [PREM: Internal Situation in East Germany], Confidential WASHINGTON, 5 February 1990, 5.30 p.m: Genscher's Visit to Washington, 2 February", in *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Volume VII: German Unification, 1989-1990*, Edited by Patrick Salmon; Keith Hamilton; Stephen Twigge, London/New York, Routledge, 2010, p. 463

⁴⁷ "Mr. Hurd to Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn). Telegraphic N. 85: Secretary of State's Call on Herr Genscher: German Unification, February 6, 1990", in *National Security Archive* <https://bit.ly/3p3RFRl>

Although Secretary of State James Baker did not consider the broader question of a possible future NATO enlargement if the Warsaw Pact would cease to exist, he embraced Gensher's formulation in the conversations with the Soviet officials. On February 9, 1990, in his meeting with the Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow, Baker linked German reunification to a NATO non-expansion pledge. After he stressed that the U.S. "does not seek in any way a unilateral advantage of the situation" unfolded in Germany and Eastern Europe, the American Secretary of State tried to convince Shevardnadze of the danger that a neutral Germany would pose for European security: "A neutral Germany would undoubtedly acquire its own independent nuclear capability."⁴⁸ Aware that the Soviet Union perceived NATO as an imperialist alliance, devoted to the destruction of socialist countries, Baker proposed a reunited Germany that is "firmly anchored in a changed NATO", a NATO that is "far less of military organization and much more of a political one". Additionally, to persuade the Soviets to accept his proposal, Baker has made it clear that "have to be iron-clad guarantees that NATO's jurisdiction or forces would not move eastward."⁴⁹

In a later conversation with Mikhail Gorbachev, the American Secretary of State reiterated the same ideas regarding Germany and NATO. Firstly, Baker put forward the "Two Plus Four" mechanism for negotiating the external aspects of reunification. Gorbachev told Baker that the Soviets also thought about this formula of negotiation, but they named it "Four Plus Two". Shifting to the American military presence in Europe through NATO and how the newly reunited Germany would be integrated within the Alliance, the American

⁴⁸ "Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow, February 9, 1990", in *National Security Archive* <https://bit.ly/45ZOTNJ>

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*

Secretary of State affirmed that if the U.S. “maintain a presence in Germany that is part of NATO, there would be no extensions of NATO’s jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east.”⁵⁰ To be more convincing of the threat of a neutral Germany, Baker even asked Gorbachev “would you prefer a united Germany outside of NATO that is independent and has no US forces or would you prefer a united Germany with ties to NATO and assurances that there would be no extension of NATO’s current jurisdiction eastward?”⁵¹ Because he did not want a replay of Versailles, Gorbachev said that the best way to “constrain that process is to ensure that Germany is contained within European structures.” Referring to the NATO expansion to the East, the Soviet leader emphasised that a “broadening of the NATO zone is not acceptable.” Baker replied “we agree with that.”⁵²

With his version of Genscher's Tutzing formula, Baker was hoping to ease Soviet concerns about NATO. His call for no extension of NATO “jurisdiction” to the East was the main topic on the agenda prepared for the Moscow visit. Deputy National Security Adviser Robert Gates, who accompanied Baker to Moscow, discussed similar terms in a meeting with Soviet intelligence chief Vladimir Kryuchkov on February 9, 1990. Gates stated that “we support the Kohl-Gensher idea of a united Germany belonging to NATO but with no expansion of military presence to the GDR. This would be in the context of continuing force reduction in Europe.”⁵³ He asked Kryuchkov what did he think

⁵⁰ “Memorandum of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow, February 9, 1990”, in *National Security Archive* <https://bit.ly/3MUUBry>

⁵¹ *Ibidem*

⁵² “Record of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow (Excerpts), February 1990”, in *National Security Archive* <https://bit.ly/3P7MbzB>

⁵³ “Memorandum of conversation between Robert Gates and Vladimir Kryuchkov in Moscow, February 9, 1990”, in *National Security Archive* <https://bit.ly/3qCzNgY>

“of the Kohl/Gensher proposal under which a united Germany would be associated with NATO but in which NATO troops would move no further east than they now were?” Gates believed that this is a sound proposal. However, the Soviet intelligence chief answered that “trust between the U.S. and USSR is growing, but that trust still had to be materialized...Kohl and Gensher have interesting ideas – but even those points in their proposals with which we agree would have to have guarantees.”⁵⁴

With the initial American assurances, it seemed that the Soviet officials were promised that the acceptance of a reunited Germany in NATO would be met by Western restraint. Even though the Tutzing formula sounded appealing to the Soviets, the American administration started to weigh the consequences that a NATO non-expansion pledge would mean. In Washington, President Bush and his National Security Council (NSC) staff started to move away from the Gensher – Baker line that was raising problems for the role of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. What would be the value of NATO’s pledge of mutual assistance to Germany in case of aggression if the pledge did not cover all of Germany’s territory?⁵⁵ The NSC staff decided that the references to “jurisdiction” should be dropped and the operative phrase should be a “special military status” for East Germany, with the details to be worked out in the “Two Plus Four” framework.⁵⁶

The “*Sonderstatus*” of the East German territory was first envisaged by NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner. In a speech about Atlantic Alliance and German Unity presented at Hamburg on February 8, 1990, Wörner argued

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*

⁵⁵ Kristina Spohr, *op.cit.*, pp.24-25

⁵⁶ Mark Kramer, “The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia”, in *The Washington Quarterly*, p.50 https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/twq/v32i2/f_0016179_13953.pdf

that “special arrangements could be devised to take account of Soviet security interests with a united Germany as a member of the Atlantic Alliance. A component of such an arrangement could be a special military status for the territory of the GDR, or perhaps an agreement not to extend military integration to that territory.”⁵⁷ Thus, Wörner’s idea, endorsed by the Bush administration, made clear that the whole of a united Germany would be protected under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, but that the territory of East Germany would be treated in a special way in order to overcome Soviet objections to Germany’s continued membership in NATO.

Prior to Helmut Kohl’s meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev on February 10, the United States sent to the West German chancellor two messages, one drafted by the NSC staff and one by the European Bureau of the Department of State. Even if the two letters contained contradictory messages, one of them talking about the “special military status for East Germany” and the other about the “not one-inch” pledge, Kohl would go to Moscow carrying an extraordinary written guarantee of American backing. During their meeting, Kohl told Gorbachev that NATO “should not expand its scope.”⁵⁸ Even though he understood that a neutral Germany was off the table for the Western side, Gorbachev asked the Chancellor what if a reunited Germany would be non-aligned like India or China.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ “Atlantic Alliance and German Unity: Speech by Secretary General, Manfred Wörner at the Überseeclub, Hamburg, 8 February 1990”, in *NATO On-line Library: NATO Speeches* https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1990/s900208a_e.htm

⁵⁸ “Memorandum of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, February 10, 1990”, in *National Security Archive* <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/16120-document-09-memorandum-conversation-between>

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*

After he acknowledged the inevitability of reunification, Gorbachev seemed to be conscious that the next step would be the acceptance of a reunified Germany in NATO. He realized that a Europe without America and in the absence of total Soviet control would mean a Europe in which Germany could become too powerful.⁶⁰ The U.S. and West Germany were careful to conduct the unification process in a way that would not make the Soviet Union look like a great loser because Moscow was already in a really weak posture. At that time, Gorbachev himself was in a delicate position. He was under siege from both the communists and the reformers from the USSR. Boris Yeltsin was elected the president of the Russian Federation and he and his colleagues began to challenge Gorbachev's authority as head of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the USSR.

During February 12 -14, 1990, how the negotiations on Germany's external unification were to be conducted was officially decided. On the margins of the Open Skies Conference in Ottawa, an agreement was reached by the Foreign Ministers of NATO and Warsaw Pact states concerned to hold discussions on external aspects of the establishment of German unity in a Two Plus Four framework.⁶¹ According to the Soviets notes, the Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze was unhappy that the conference, which was supposed to be about the "Open Skies" Treaty transformed into a discussion about the reunification of Germany: "I am in a stupid situation – we are discussing the Open Skies, but my colleagues are talking about unification of

⁶⁰ Angela E. Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn: Unification, the Soviet Collapse, and the New Europe*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 113

⁶¹"NATO Update: February 1990", in *NATO* <https://www.nato.int/docu/update/1990/9002e.htm>

Germany as if it was a fact.”⁶² James Baker stated once again to Shevardnadze that if a united Germany stays in NATO, “we should take care about non-expansion of its jurisdiction to the East”.⁶³

The United States, after promising to adapt NATO in a way that would appear less threatening to the Soviet people, convinced FRG to apply chequebook diplomacy in its relations with the Soviet Union as compensation for the major concessions that Moscow might be willing to make. At the Camp David summit, on February 24, 1990, Chancellor Helmut Kohl started the meeting with President Bush by thanking him for the support that the U.S. gave him ahead of the talks with Gorbachev. After he shared his concerns about how the border question would be solved with Poland, Kohl mentioned that a united Germany will be a member of NATO but a transition period is needed in which NATO units, including *Bundeswehr* forces dedicated to NATO, cannot be stationed on East German soil.⁶⁴ President Bush emphasised that full German membership in NATO is linked to the American ability to sustain US troops in Europe. Turning to the Soviets, the American President remarked that the Soviets are not in a position to dictate Germany's relationship with NATO. After all, the victory of the Cold War was of the United States: “We prevailed and they didn't. We can't let the Soviets clutch victory from the jaws of defeat.”⁶⁵ Worried about the Soviet position, the chancellor said that the Soviets are negotiating, but this may end up as a matter of cash because they need money: “There will be concerns for the

⁶² “Teimuraz Stepanov-Mamaladze notes from Conference on Open Skies, Ottawa, Canada, February 1990”, in *National Security Archive* <https://shorturl.at/pzLMY>

⁶³ *Ibidem*

⁶⁴ “Memorandum of Conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush at Camp David, February 24, 1990”, in *National Security Archive* <https://shorturl.at/grt46>

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p.9

Soviets if Germany remains in NATO, for their security. And they will want to get something in return”, said Kohl. Suggesting how the FRG might help Gorbachev to save his face in the negotiations, Bush told Kohl that “you've got deep pockets.”⁶⁶

At the joint news conference following discussions, the two leaders noted that in a unified German state the former territory of the GDR “should have a special military status, that it would take into account the legitimate security interests of all interested countries, including those of the Soviet Union.”⁶⁷ Asked about the role of NATO in Europe given the fact that the Soviet Union is less and less a threat, President Bush replied that the enemy now is “unpredictability” and “instability.”⁶⁸ The U.S. determined to maintain its troops on European soil and to continue its commitment toward the transatlantic security.

The negotiations for German reunification turned out into a discussion about the future of European security. The U.S. wanted to clarify that the CSCE cannot replace NATO as the core of the West’s strategy in Europe. If the Soviets wanted the U.S. to remain a “European power”, it had to accept that NATO was the *raison d'être* for keeping Washington’s forces in Europe. By the end of February, the United States, alongside RFG, managed to impose their agenda on the Soviets. USSR was unable to come up with a coherent negotiating strategy given the USSR’s weak economic and political situation. As a result, the U.S. tried to achieve the unification of Germany absolutely on Western terms.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p.10

⁶⁷ “Joint News Conference Following Discussions With Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Federal Republic of Germany, 1990-02-25”, in *Public Papers of the Presidents...* <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/1585>

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*

The Road to a post-Cold War European security architecture

The events that occurred constantly decreased the negotiating leverage of the Soviet Union. In March 1990, with the first free elections in East Germany, the communist regime had completely lost its legitimacy. With more than 98% voter participation overall, the CDU – CSU coalition, which campaigned on a platform of rapid unification of Germany, secured 48% of the vote, far more than any other party. It was clear that the political system of the GDR had no democratic legitimacy.⁶⁹ Moreover, the Soviet empire started to crumble. On March 11, 1990, Lithuania's legislative Supreme Council voted in favour of declaring independence. The Baltic states' separatism undermined with acceleration Gorbachev's leadership.

Even if they bargained from a position of weakness, the Soviets attempted to speak out against full German NATO membership and propose a new and different European security architecture to emerge once the Cold War was ending. During a meeting in Washington, Shevardnadze told President Bush that at the upcoming CSCE summit, the member states "have to prepare and design some fundamental European security structures."⁷⁰ From the Soviet point of view, the CSCE was the organization that would replace the two ideologically opposed alliances, NATO and Warsaw Pact, that competed during the Cold War. However, the American President considered that CSCE "will be an important pillar in the new Europe but we should not try to make it do more than it can."⁷¹ He emphasised that European stability is enhanced by a U.S. presence.

⁶⁹ Mary Elise Sarotte, *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*, London, Yale University Press, 2021, p. 82

⁷⁰ "Memorandum of conversation between George Bush and Eduard Shevardnadze in Washington, April 6, 1990", in *National Security Archive* <https://shorturl.at/ixzKN>

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p.8

Valentin Falin, the Central Committee's most senior expert on Germany, wrote in a memorandum sent to Gorbachev that the Soviets' limited freedom of manoeuvre made the West maximally realize its long-time aspirations without risking a serious confrontation. He thought that the "West is outplaying us, promising to respect the interests of the USSR, but in practice, step by step, separating us from <<traditional Europe>>".⁷² Falin urged the Soviet leader to necessary put forth a very definite and firm position.

Washington sensed the way Moscow perceived Western intentions to maintain NATO at the core of European security. To appease the Soviets, President Bush announced on May 4, 1990, that a wide-ranging NATO strategy review would be launched for the transformed Europe of the 1990s.⁷³ Plus, he called off any further modernization of U.S. nuclear artillery shells deployed in Europe and the follow-on to the Lance program. In his address, Bush also pointed to the need of strengthening CSCE and called for accelerated negotiations toward a Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE treaty), followed by U.S.-Soviet negotiations on short-range nuclear forces. In the same fashion, James Baker told the Soviet foreign minister during a meeting in Bonn about Bush's speech to reassure Shevardnadze that the process "would not yield winners and losers. Instead, would produce a new legitimate European structure, one that would be inclusive, not exclusive."⁷⁴ Shevardnadze welcomed the remarks and even if he recalled the difficulty to accept a reunified Germany

⁷² "Valentin Falin Memorandum to Mikhail Gorbachev (Excerpts), April 18, 1990", in *National Security Archive* <https://shorturl.at/cfkmE>

⁷³ "Remarks at the Oklahoma State University Commencement Ceremony in Stillwater, 1990-05-04", in *Public Papers of the Presidents...* <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/1853>

⁷⁴ "James A. Baker III, Memorandum for the President, <<My meeting with Shevardnadz>>, May 4, 1990", in *National Security Archive* <https://shorturl.at/egmAR>

in NATO, the Soviet foreign minister agreed that neutrality was not the answer for long-term stability. He stated clearly, according to Baker, that the Soviets want the American military presence in Europe.⁷⁵

In the run-up to the U.S. – Soviet summit in Washington, the Bush administration sought to demonstrate that it is making an effort to respond to Soviet concerns. In his meeting with Gorbachev on May 18, 1990, the American Secretary of State provided the Soviet leader nine points of assurance to prove that USSR's position is being taken into account. The assurances included: limiting the *Bundeswehr*; accelerating negotiations on tactical nuclear weapons; ensuring that Germany would not produce, develop, or acquire chemical or biological weapons; for an agreed transition period, NATO troops would not be stationed on the territory of the GDR; for an agreed transition period Soviet troops would remain on the territory of the GDR; adapting NATO politically and militarily; reaching an agreement on the Polish-German border; transform the CSCE into a permanent institution that would become an important cornerstone of a new Europe; the Soviet Union's economic interests to be duly considered during the unification process.⁷⁶

However, the conversation in Moscow continued with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze questioning the status of Germany in NATO. The Soviet Foreign Minister pointed out this time that if "united Germany becomes a member of NATO, it will blow up perestroika. Our people will not forgive us. People will say that we ended up the losers, not the winners."⁷⁷ Evaluating the new role of

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*

⁷⁶ "Record of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker (with delegations), Moscow, May 18, 1990", in *National Security Archive* <https://shorturl.at/prwPY>

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 29-30

NATO that Washington was talking about, Gorbachev suggested that the USSR propose to join the Alliance because the U.S. “say that NATO is not directed against us”. Regarding CSCE, the two sides had also different perceptions. Baker admitted the U.S. opinion and said that “It’s nice to talk about pan-European security structures, the role of the CSCE. It is a wonderful dream, but just a dream. In the meantime, NATO already exists....” But Shevardnadze insisted that the CSCE process “is a reality. We have to think about European security structures that would not be based on blocs. We can create them.”⁷⁸

Soviet reticence was more a bargaining tactic, rather than an inflexible unwillingness to change its position hardly defended during the negotiation process. Both the Americans and the Germans realised that Soviet resistance was further weakening. By the end of May, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, after one of his latest meetings with Shevardnadze, believed that Russians are coming to terms with German membership of NATO and that their desire for CSCE summit this year gives the West leverage.”⁷⁹

At the Washington summit on May 31, the two superpowers’ leaders tried to settle the outstanding Cold War disputes: the division of Germany and Europe, significant reductions in the Soviet military threat to the West, and the transformation of the U.S. – Soviet relationship toward one of true cooperation. As Gorbachev was facing a political and economic crisis at home, he needed a successful summit, so the Bush administration meant to give him one. The states signed a trade pact, even though the Soviet Union had not relaxed its economic

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*

⁷⁹“Mr Hurd to Sir C.Mallaby (Bonn), No. 368 Telegraphic, Parts 1 and 2 [WRL 020/13], Confidential FCO, 29 May 1990, 10.05 a.m.” in *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Volume VII...*, p. 676

embargo against Lithuania, and pledged to reach agreements on reducing chemical weapons and strategic nuclear arms.

On the issue of Germany, Gorbachev confirmed that under the Helsinki Final Act, a united Germany would “decide on its own which alliance she would be a member of.”⁸⁰ Even though he implied that his preference is for a Germany with one foot in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, Gorbachev made the concession that the Bush administration was waiting for. At the end of their meeting, both leaders agreed that the matter of alliance membership is, in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act, a matter for the Germans to decide.⁸¹ It was evident that Gorbachev gave his assent for a reunified Germany in NATO.

But after this summit, the West was again reminded of the instability of Soviet positions. At the second ministerial meeting of the Two Plus Four, Shevardnadze tabled a lengthy paper on elements for a final settlement that showed once again the USSR’s intransigence. Nevertheless, his display was intended to a great extent for domestic Soviet purposes and was not immutable.⁸² The Politburo was still dismayed by the loss of the Eastern European empire and the prospect of a reunified Germany in NATO. Besides, the growing domestic crisis made Gorbachev look less like a man in power and more like an embattled leader, as American Ambassador John Matlock claimed in a cable sent to the U.S.

⁸⁰ “Excerpt from the second conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and G. Bush, Washington, White House, May 31, 1990”, in *The National Security Archive - The Washington/Camp David Summit 1990: From the Secret Soviet, American and German Files* <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB320/11.pdf>

⁸¹“News Conference of President Bush and President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union, 1990-06-03”, in *Public Papers of the Presidents...* <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/1946>

⁸²“Mr Hurd to Sir M.Alexander (UKDEL NATO), No. 149 Telegraphic [WRL 020/12], Confidential FCO, 23 June 1990”, in *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Volume VII...*,p.717

Department of State on May 1990.⁸³ Thus, Washington needed to publicize NATO's new approach towards the East in a context that would help Gorbachev gain domestic support. As the Washington high-level meeting seemed part of a Gorbachev political campaign, the NATO summit was expected to have the same effect in Moscow.

On July 5-6, 1990, right in the middle of the Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the NATO summit was held in London. President Bush believed that revamping NATO's public image would help the Soviet leader to defend himself at the Congress.⁸⁴ The NSC staff, working closely with a small group of State and Defense aides, prepared a succinct draft declaration before the NATO summit to support Gorbachev to prevail over his opponents at the CPSU Congress in the short term and convince the Soviet leader to accept a united Germany without significant restrictions on NATO in the longer term.⁸⁵ To avoid bureaucratic entanglement, the U.S. decided to hold the text closely, and have the President send it to fellow heads of state just days before the summit, allowing it to be negotiated only by foreign ministers and leaders at the summit itself.⁸⁶

The final Declaration underlined that a united Germany in the Atlantic Alliance of free democracies will be an indispensable factor of stability and proposed to the member states of the Warsaw Treaty Organization a joint declaration in which they would solemnly state that are no longer adversaries.

⁸³ “<<Gorbachev Confronts Crisis of Power>>, Moscow 15714, Cable from U.S. Embassy Moscow to U.S. Department of State, 11 May 1990”, in *The National Security Archive* <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB320/01.pdf>

⁸⁴ Mary Elise Sarotte, “Perpetuating U. S. Preeminence: The 1990 Deals to “Bribe the Soviets Out” and Move NATO In”, in *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Summer 2010, p. 123 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40784649>

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p.128

⁸⁶ James A. Baker III, *op.cit.*, p. 258

Moreover, it called for completing the first treaty to reduce and limit conventional armed forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) and a more institutionalized CSCE.⁸⁷ The elements of the London Declaration managed to reach to Moscow. With concrete evidence that NATO had changed and European security structures were being strengthened, Gorbachev successfully emerged from Congress and win re-election as general secretary.

By the beginning of July, Germany and the United States offered the USSR political and economic incentives to make German membership in NATO more reasonable for the Soviet people who lost eastern Germany to the Western Alliance. Yet, Gorbachev still thought about alternatives other than a full NATO membership for a reunited Germany. There were many models of alliance membership like the French model, with non-integration into the military command or the Danish-Norwegian, with prohibitions on the stationing of foreign troops and nuclear weapons. To avoid such proposals from the USSR, Helmut Kohl sought an invitation to go to Russia so that he could negotiate a favourable final deal.

The agreement reached by Chancellor Kohl and Gorbachev on July 15-16, 1990, has brought about a sea change in the negotiations. Throughout their meeting, Gorbachev consented to full German sovereignty and membership in NATO. Anyway, he offered a compromise: the non-proliferation of NATO's military structures to the territory of the GDR and maintaining Soviet troops there for a certain transition period. Gorbachev told Kohl that "United Germany

⁸⁷ Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council ("The London Declaration"), 05 Jul. 1990 - 06 Jul. 1990", in *NATO* https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23693.htm

is a member of NATO. De facto, the former territory of the GDR will not enter NATO's sphere of operation as long as Soviet troops are there."⁸⁸ The Chancellor found the concessions reasonable, even though he also agreed to reduce the size of the *Bundeswehr* to 370,000 troops within three to four years.⁸⁹

The breakthrough that had been achieved during the bilateral discussions was the product of an intense five months of meetings and bargaining, in which the United States had played a major role. During the Two plus Four Ministerial Meeting on July 17, Shevardnadze underlined the importance of the London NATO Declaration in making German membership of NATO acceptable.⁹⁰ Thus, all parties involved in the negotiations laid the groundwork for the German-Soviet deal.

As the terms of the final agreement seemed to be completely reached, there was a realistic prospect of wrapping the whole process up at the next Ministerial Meeting on September 12, 1990. Gathered in Moscow, all six ministers in the Two-Plus-Four process were ready to agree on the text of the final treaty on German unification. But a major problem has arisen at the very last minute of negotiations: NATO's future role in Germany. The Soviet side still insisted that, even after the withdrawal of their forces from GDR territory, non-German forces could neither be stationed nor deployed in that territory. This request created the same problem: would Germany be partly in NATO and partly not? To eliminate

⁸⁸“From the One-on-One Conversation of M.S. Gorbachev with H. Kohl, July 15, 1990”, in *National Security Archive* <https://shorturl.at/cFHRZ>

⁸⁹“Results of the Kohl-Gorbachev Talks (July 15-16, 1990)”, in *German History in Documents and Images: One Germany in Europe (1989-2009)* https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=3290

⁹⁰“Mr Hurd to Sir M. Alexander (UKDEL NATO), No. 173 Telegraphic [WRL 020/12], Confidential FCO, 18 July 1990, 9.00 a.m.: Two plus Four Ministerial Meeting, Paris, 17 July”, in *Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series III, Volume VII...*, p. 729

the confusion, the U.S. came up with the idea of a written addendum to the treaty that would explain the meaning of the word “deployed”. As a result, the formal treaty would continue to state in Article 5 (3), as Moscow wanted, that foreign armed forces will not be stationed in Eastern Germany or deployed there following the completion of the Soviet armed forces. However, the new addendum or “agreed minute” to the treaty stipulated that “any question with respect to the application of the word “deployed... will be decided by the Government of a united Germany in a reasonable and responsible way.”⁹¹ It was a remarkable formulation and indeed may have constituted a unique case in international law, whereby the interpretation of an element of a multilateral treaty is left solely to the discretion of one signatory.⁹²

On October 3, 1990, Germany was able to unify as planned, with NATO’s full legal jurisdiction. The reunification prompted a seismic change in the European security system. A “Europe whole and free” was emerging as NATO reformed, CSCE started to be institutionalised and Warsaw Pact was about to dissolve. But, as James Baker asserted, “Almost every achievement contains within its success the seeds of a future problem”.⁹³ Years later, as NATO started its enlargement process, Russian officials accused Washington of breaking its promise not to expand NATO. In 1993, Russian President Boris Yeltsin wrote to U.S. President Bill Clinton that “the spirit of the Treaty on the Final Settlement with respect to Germany... precludes the option of expanding the NATO zone

⁹¹ “September 12 Two-Plus-Four Ministerial in Moscow: Detailed account [includes text of the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany and Agreed Minute to the Treaty on the special military status of the GDR after unification], November 2, 1990”, in *National Security Archives* <https://shorturl.at/hpvGI>

⁹² Robert L. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War: An Insider's Account of US Diplomacy in Europe, 1989-1992*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p.139

⁹³ James A. Baker III, *op.cit.*, p. 84

into the East.”⁹⁴ In the 2010s, President Vladimir Putin declared that the West had lied to Russia about NATO expansion: “At one time we were promised that after Germany’s unification, NATO wouldn’t spread eastward.”⁹⁵ Even Mikhail Gorbachev argued that “the decision for the U.S. and its allies to expand NATO into the east... was definitely a violation of the spirit of the statements and assurances made to us in 1990”.⁹⁶

What is clear is that the February 1990 talks and the subsequent treaty for German reunification created confusion in Russian circles over what the United States promised. No deal was reached against NATO expansion, but the suggestions made by key political actors, such as Baker, Genscher and Kohl, in the initial phase of negotiations, were interpreted as pledges against NATO expansion. Moreover, the transformation of NATO into a more political alliance and the American efforts to engage the Soviet Union in the new European security architecture implied, in Moscow’s perception, the existence of a non-expansion deal.

Conclusions

Achieved within the context of an emergent new order in Europe and the transformation of its key institutions, the reunification of Germany resulted from ten months of intense bargaining that revealed the United States and Soviet

⁹⁴“Retranslation of Yeltsin letter on NATO expansion, September 15, 1993”, in *National Security Archives* <https://shorturl.at/pCLT2>

⁹⁵ David M. Herszenhorn, “Away From Show of Diplomacy in Geneva, Putin Puts On a Show of His Own”, in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2014 <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/18/world/europe/russia-ukraine.html>

⁹⁶ Maxim Kórshunov, “Mikhail Gorbachev: I am against all walls” in *Russia Beyond*, October 16, 2014 https://www.rbth.com/international/2014/10/16/mikhail_gorbachev_i_am_against_all_walls_40673.html

strategies for Europe and the whole post-Cold War world. Negotiating during a period in which both sides were determined to move beyond containment to an era of enduring cooperation, the two super-powers tried to overcome Europe's division and settled the disputes that were at the root of the Cold War conflict.

During the diplomacy surrounding German reunification, Washington attempted not just to secure German interests, but also the American ones. Aware of Moscow's weak positions, American officials used the process of German reunification to strengthen the United States' position in Europe after the Cold War. Rather than embracing the Soviets' ideas of new pan-European institutions, Washington preferred to maintain and adapt the NATO alliance in order to make sure the American presence would continue in Europe.

Without an effective and coherent strategy regarding Germany, the Soviet Union presented an ambivalent position during the process of German reunification. Even though Mikhail Gorbachev and Eduard Shevardnadze eventually realized that full German NATO membership was inevitable, they were constantly testing the West. But, the two inducements offered by the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States that consisted in financial aid and reforms of NATO, made the Soviets to finally accept the Western conditions.

The diplomacy of German reunification could be framed in the dynamic of rising and declining powers. The United States found itself in a strong position as the democratic wave was sweeping the Central and Eastern Europe, its economy was solid and the military was at a high degree of readiness after President Reagan started the build-up. In contrast, the Soviet Union witnessed the demise of its empire and the economic, social, and military problems were mounting. It is by no means surprising that Washington was able to achieve all of

its objectives without making any major concessions. Although the United States wanted to avoid a process of negotiations that would yield winners and losers, the long-term outcome proved the opposite. How the American officials have considered the security interest of Moscow at that time remain a source of tension and controversy even in today's relations between the United States and Russia.

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