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An 'Arm Around the Shoulder': The United States, NATO and German Reunification, 1989–90

FRANK COSTIGLIOLA

United Germany 'will stand with us as an ally,' confidently predicted Robert B. Zoellick, who served as Secretary of State James A. Baker 3rd's chief of staff and as the overseer of US negotiations on reunification. Testifying before the Senate in September 1990 on the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, Zoellick asserted that the unification process proved that 'the United States can lead and persevere . . . in the post-cold war world'.¹ Despite such optimism, however, the ambivalence in past US–German relations, the erosion of American leverage during the unification process and the narrowness of Washington's conception of 'leadership' in Europe all suggested a future more problematic than the happy scenario Zoellick sketched for the senators.²

Starting off with an analysis of US policy towards Western Europe in 1989–90, this essay examines how German reunification highlighted the strengths and the limits of Washington's influence in Europe. The Bush Administration approached the revolutionary changes in Europe with an overriding, often narrowly conceived, objective: sustaining US predominance in NATO and in Western Europe. An

¹ US Senate Foreign Relations Committee (thereafter FRC), *Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany* (thereafter *Treaty*), 101st Congress, 2nd sess., 28 Sept. 1990, 2–3.

² Most studies of German unification share Zoellick's optimism. The most comprehensive accounts are Stephen F. Szabo, *The Diplomacy of German Unification* (thereafter Szabo, *German Unification*) (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992) and Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall. Germany's Road to Unification* (thereafter Pond, *Beyond*) (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993). An essential first-hand account is Horst Teltschik, *329 Tage: Innenansichten der Einigung* (thereafter Teltschik, *329 Tage*) (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1991). For essential documentation, see Kark Kaiser, *Deutschlands Vereinigung: Die internationale Aspekte* (thereafter Kaiser, *Deutschlands Vereinigung*) (Bergische Gladbach: Bastei Luebbe, 1991). See also Michael Stürmer, *Die Grenzen der Macht: Begegnung der Deutschen mit der Geschichte* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1992); Paul E. Gallis, *The Unification of Germany: Background and Analysis of the Two-Plus-Four Talks* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 1990); Alexander Moens, 'American Diplomacy and German Unification' (thereafter Moens, 'Diplomacy'), *Survival*, Vol. 43, no. 6 (1991), 531–45; Wolfgang Heisenberg, ed., *German Unification in European Perspective* (London: Brassey's, 1991); Peter Neckermann, *The Unification of Germany* (Boulder, Col.: East European Monographs, 1991); Wolfgang F. Schlör, *German Security Policy* (London: Brassey, 1993); A. James McAdams, *Germany Divided. From the Wall to Reunification* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

evaluation of the aims and the efficacy of United States policy in the matter of German reunification offers a sobering test case of the constraints Washington may face as a superpower with limited financial and political means. Ironically, although Washington officials assumed that support from a united Germany would help them surmount these limits, US leverage over Bonn declined with the progress of unification.

Despite four decades of close relations between the United States and the Federal Republic and the ritual vows of mutual trust, many American leaders maintained, *sub rosa*, a measure of suspicion about whether the Germans would, as Zoellick predicted, 'stand with us as an ally'. And, in fact, Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher did not always define German self-interest in terms of close co-operation with the United States. At two significant turning points – on 28 November 1989, when Kohl seized the leadership of the unification movement, and on 16–17 July 1990, when Kohl struck a final deal with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev – the Germans took advantage of circumstances to shape events largely on their own, and the United States had to adjust to the new realities.

Bush Administration officials tried to influence the unification process by keeping, as one of them explained, an 'arm around the shoulder' of the West Germans.³ As the metaphor suggested, Americans and West Germans worked easily together, and had done so for four decades. But the habitual closeness between Washington and Bonn also involved degrees of persuasion, ranging from gentle nudging to stiff-armed pressure, with the Americans usually steering the Germans. Throughout the Cold War, the US and West Germany – and the other NATO nations with the sometime exception of France – generally played down such constraints so as not to muddy their publics' sense of ally and enemy. In 1989–90, however, the Americans discovered that Bonn was often able to use the arm-around-the shoulder to steer them. Although the US helped Kohl and Genscher overcome Soviet, British and French hesitations about unification,⁴ America's influence proved to be a wasting asset. Even before the end of the eleven-month unification period, the Germans were able, in deft and studiously inoffensive ways, to manoeuvre between East and West.

The FRG's enhanced independence had great significance, not least because the Bush Administration, like its predecessors, habitually relied on Germany to contribute money to Washington's projects around the globe, to watch out for American concerns in the European Community (EC) and, above all, to sustain America's predominance in NATO and NATO's pre-eminence in European security. Robert Blackwill, the National Security Council official most closely involved with German unification, explained that 'shared US–German strategic objectives' had become the 'most important' foundation of America's position in Europe. Without

³ *New York Times*, 7 Dec. 1989.

⁴ For an overview of French, British and Soviet opposition to reunification, see Pond, *Beyond*, 156–60.

that political and military link, Blackwill warned, 'it is illusory to believe that the United States can successfully protect its commercial interests vis-à-vis Europe'.⁵

Dependent on German support, America's leadership in Western Europe also rested, albeit precariously, on its military command of NATO. With US economic and political leverage limited by a chronic shortage of funds, Washington relied on NATO as the major vehicle for leadership in Europe. As an American diplomat at NATO headquarters explained, the military command of the alliance enabled Washington to 'tell the Europeans what we want on a whole lot of issues – trade, agriculture, the gulf, you name it'.⁶ Whether the Western Europeans would actually do what the Americans wanted was quite another question, however, particularly when the EC tried to move towards a single market and a coherent voice in political and security matters. As Germany unified in 1989–90, NATO appeared more necessary than ever to Washington officials. Yet those were the years when the retreating Soviet military forces were taking 'home the threat that gave NATO its resilience and *raison d'être*,' observed Josef Joffe, the pro-NATO German analyst.⁷ During the negotiations on German unification, the United States did exercise successful leadership, but much of its leverage arose from the fading circumstances of Bonn's dependence on American support and Washington's command of a needed military alliance.

The Bush Administration's reliance on NATO and its insistence on dominating the alliance were symptomatic of a national impoverishment in money and in imagination. America's inability in the Reagan and Bush years to resolve the budget deficit impasse meant that there was too little money for alternative economic and political strategies. The administration's unwillingness to accept the end of easy American predominance in Western Europe was aggravated by insufficient creative thinking about how to share decision-making – and not just burdens – with the European allies. Despite talk about a more equal partnership with Western Europe, Bush Administration officials, like their predecessors, reflexively assumed that they could still make most of the important decisions for the Western alliance.

⁵ Robert Blackwill, 'The Security Implications of a United Germany: Paper II', *Adelphi Papers*, No. 257 (Winter 1990/1), 94–5. For a superb analysis of the ambivalence in the US–German relationship, see Wolfram F. Hanrieder, *Germany, America, Europe: Forty Years of German Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), esp. 378–86. Hanrieder should be read along with Robbin F. Laird, *The Soviets, Germany, and the New Europe* (thereafter Laird, *Soviet*) (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1991). For the importance of the relationship with Germany and an advisory against Americans assuming that they can oversee Bonn's policies, see Daniel Hamilton and James Clad, 'Germany, Japan, and the False Glare of War' (thereafter Hamilton, Clad, 'Germany'), *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 14 (1991), 39–49, and Ronald D. Asmus, 'Germany and America: Partners in Leadership?', *Survival*, Vol. 33, no. 6 (1991), 546–66. Karl Kaiser, 'Germany's Unification' (thereafter Kaiser, 'Unification'), *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70 (1991), 179–205, is thorough and thoughtful but glosses over inter-allied differences.

⁶ *New York Times*, 9 June 1991. For an argument on the futility of Washington's trying to wield such leverage through NATO in the future, see Hugh De Santis, 'The Graying of NATO', *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 14 (1991), 51–64. For the case for NATO's continued importance in the 1990s, see Charles L. Glaser, 'Why NATO Is Still best', *International Security*, Vol. 18, no. 1 (1993), 5–50.

⁷ Josef Joffe, 'The Security Implications of a United Germany', *Adelphi Papers*, No. 257 (Winter 1990/91), 87.

In early 1990, the multi-talented Zoellick, who served as State Department Counselor, as Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs and as 'Baker's extra brain', as a close observer put it,⁸ published an essay that inadvertently pointed up the conceptual barriers to a more equal partnership with Western Europe. Zoellick believed that the fall of the Berlin Wall opened up three possible scenarios: (1) Europe west of the Soviet Union might grow 'insular' by becoming preoccupied with European problems; (2) it might become 'itinerant' by pursuing its own path in world affairs without the benefit of 'new, durable alliance ties' with the United States; or (3) the Continent might develop a proper 'international' stance by co-operating closely with America (and with Japan). The negative connotations (especially in America) of 'insular' and 'itinerant' and the positive sense of 'international' clearly pointed to the last as the correct policy, and Zoellick drove home his message with a list of ten 'practical lessons for the post-Cold War age'. He warned Europeans against returning to their 'past, when wandering, unsettled spirits ... roamed the globe' with little respect for the 'perspectives of non-Europeans'. Zoellick feared that an 'autonomous' and hence irresponsible Europe would disrupt US efforts to organise what President Bush would soon term a new world order. Although Zoellick's descriptions of the US-European-Japanese grouping suggested a community with his repeated use of words like 'we', 'us' and 'our', he had little to say about the central question of how this triumvirate would actually make decisions. Instead, his emphasis on the 'shared ideas and values' uniting the three implied that the United States, as senior partner with the clearest ideas and the most universal values, would continue to set most of the agenda and priorities for others. In a key 'lesson' that stressed the need for greater co-operation between NATO ('a brilliant success') and the EC, Zoellick detailed the many new political functions that NATO might assume in Europe while offering little about the political role of the EC.⁹ Although Zoellick wanted to revitalise the US-European partnership, he, like Baker and other American leaders, found it difficult to conceptualise any relationship that did not reinforce the predominance of NATO and of the United States.

Western Europe and the 'New World Order'

American pre-eminence in Western Europe was an essential component of what George Bush called the 'new world order' for the 'next American century'.¹⁰ Baker shared this sense of manifest destiny. At his Senate confirmation hearing, Baker announced that his first principle as Secretary of State would be 'the necessity for American leadership' around the globe. Like many Americans since the early

⁸ Elizabeth Drew, 'Letter from Washington', *New Yorker* (thereafter, Drew, 'Letter'), Vol. 66 (2 July 1990), 66.

⁹ Robert B. Zoellick, 'Practical Lessons for the Post-Cold War Age', *European Affairs*, No. 4 (Winter 1990), 79–84. See also FRC, 'Nomination of Robert B. Zoellick to be Counselor of the Department of State', 21 Feb. 1989 (unpublished hearing), 36–7.

¹⁰ 'Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union', 29 Jan. 1991, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, Vol. 27, no. 5 (4 Feb. 1991), 91, 95.

Puritans, Baker began with the doctrine that the United States enjoyed a special providence: 'We are the largest nation We have the biggest economy. We believe in the finest principles and have the finest traditions.' With these blessings, the United States remained 'the last, best hope of earth', he affirmed, quoting Abraham Lincoln.

Yet despite Baker's glowing confidence that the United States was the 'biggest' and the 'finest', his pragmatism forced him and other US officials to grapple with the gloomy reality that deep trade and budget deficits made America's global leadership precariously dependent on contributions from, as Baker put it in January 1989, 'increasingly influential allies', particularly West Germany and Japan.¹¹ America's financial limits pinched hard. A top State Department official, frustrated by the lack of funds for new US programmes in post-Wall Europe, observed that 'we reach into our pockets and all we have is loose change. You have to put your money where your mouth is, and we're broke.'¹²

This gnawing problem worried Lawrence S. Eagleburger, number two in the State Department and the official who would succeed Baker in 1992. In 1988, Eagleburger co-authored for the President-elect a review of US foreign policy, of which the first point asserted that 'the ability of the U.S. government to get control over the Federal budget is fundamental to effective U.S. foreign policy'.¹³ Since 1957, Eagleburger had served at the Pentagon, NATO headquarters, the White House and the National Security Council. From this broad perspective, he concluded in 1989 that, although 'we dominate less than we used to', the United States still could lead the globe. The trick was for Washington deftly to 'manage' its relations with Western Europe and Japan, that is, to tap their burgeoning wealth and power. '[W]e dominate clearly,' Eagleburger explained, 'if the West can collectively act together.' Eagleburger presumed that 'it rests in the hands of the United States to take the country and the West ... into the 21st century'.¹⁴ Appropriately, Bush coined the slogan 'a new world order' in the context of 'a real selling campaign', as his aides put it, to enlist contributions of men, money, and materiel from other nations for Operation Desert Shield in the Persian Gulf. '[A]s I look at the countries that are chipping in here now, I think we do have a chance at a new world order,' the President declared in August 1990. 'We [are] tak[ing] the lead,' he explained, because some nation had to organise and manage the new coalition.¹⁵ In this global division of labour, then, the United States would make most of the decisions while Germany, Japan and other rich nations would be expected to pay many if not most of the bills. As Congressional aides put it half-jokingly, 'the Germans, Japanese and Saudis ought to meet *our* responsibilities'.¹⁶ This belief that America's allies should help pay for America's foreign policy had a long history, and much of it centred on West Germany.

¹¹ FRC, *Nomination of James A. Baker III*, 17, 18 Jan. 1989, 12, 73.

¹² *New York Times*, 7 Dec. 1989.

¹³ [American Agenda, Incorporated], *American Agenda* [1988], 88.

¹⁴ FRC, *Nomination of Lawrence S. Eagleburger*, 101st Cong., 1st sess., 15, 16 March 1989, 50.

¹⁵ *New York Times*, 31 Aug. 1990.

¹⁶ *International Herald Tribune*, 14 June 1991 (emphasis in original).

Four Decades of Close Relations and Closet Distrust

Since the late 1950s, American officials had looked particularly to wealthy West Germany for help in carrying out US responsibilities, while at the same time they harboured a distrust of that essential ally. When the United States first began to feel the squeeze of a trade surplus too narrow to finance its overseas public and private expenditures, President Dwight D. Eisenhower concluded that 'we are spending too many billions all around the world without the Europeans taking a commensurate load'.¹⁷ Shortly before leaving office, Eisenhower sent Secretary of the Treasury Robert B. Anderson on an unsuccessful mission to Bonn to obtain a large cash payment for the US troops stationed in the FRG. In John F. Kennedy's Administration, Under Secretary of State George Ball argued that Bonn owed the United States a debt for past aid, for the American soldiers protecting West Germany and for Washington's having opened world markets. In the context of a personal letter to Chancellor Konrad Adenauer detailing the American military build-up in the Berlin crisis, Kennedy drove home the need for Bonn to extend more balance of payments help. In the Gilpatric–Strauss agreements of 1961–2, the FRG agreed to offset, through purchases of United States weapons, the balance of payments costs of keeping American troops in West Germany.¹⁸ Responding to prodding by the Americans, West Germany also assumed more of the burden of aid to developing nations. The offset arrangements continued until 1975 when Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who had long resented the purchase of sometimes unwanted weapons, refused to negotiate another agreement.¹⁹ As the Iron Curtain lifted in 1989, Washington looked to Bonn to assume much of the burden of aiding central and Eastern Europe, even though the FRG quickly found itself strained to meet the needs of the collapsing German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Among many US officials, the move towards reunification brought to the surface old anxieties about Germany, suspicions not completely eradicated during the decades of US co-operation with the staid FRG. Americans had long feared, first, that West Germany might someday break free from its ties to NATO and the EC and become a loose cannon between East and West and, secondly, that the German people might succumb again to dangerous mass behaviour. Not trusting what a truly independent Germany might do, US policy makers (along with their British, French and, in a more brutal way, their Soviet counterparts) confined the

¹⁷ Andrew Goodpaster, Memorandum of Conversation with the President, 25 Aug. 1959, no. 1987/1713, Declassified Documents Reference Service.

¹⁸ 'Points Which the President May Wish to Emphasize in Discussion with Foreign Minister Brentano', 16 Feb. 1961, Box 116A, President's Office File (hereafter POF), John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Mass.; Ball to President Kennedy [March 1961], *ibid.*; Kennedy to Adenauer, Box 117, *ibid.*; 'US–German Military Cooperation: Status of Offset Arrangements, Sale of PERSHING/SERGEANTS, German MAP', 11 June 1963, no. 1979/305B, DDRS. See also Frank Costigliola, 'The Pursuit of Atlantic Community: Nuclear Arms, Dollars, and Berlin', in Thomas G. Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest for Victory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 35.

¹⁹ See Joseph S. Lepgold, 'Hegemonic Decline and Adaptation in American Foreign Policy: the United States and European Defense 1960–1980', PhD thesis, Stanford University, 1987, 448–51.

divided Germans with a network of alliances, common markets and treaties. Even in the depths of the Cold War, one could discern the faint outline of the Second World War Grand Alliance directed against Germany. In May 1958, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who had developed close personal ties with Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and who often favoured West Germany over other allies such as France, confided to American diplomats: 'If I had to choose between a neutralized Germany and a Germany in the [Soviet] bloc, it would be almost better to have it in the bloc.'²⁰ When President Kennedy in January 1963 asked veteran diplomat David Bruce to review Washington's policy towards Western Europe, Bruce, like Dulles before him, emphasised the importance of limiting Germany's freedom to manoeuvre. He stressed that Western European unity functioned as an essential 'framework within which to contain and provide a creative outlet for a West Germany which might be tempted to seek reunification with East Germany through bilateral arrangements with Moscow, or otherwise prove a disruptive element in the world power balance'.²¹ American leaders believed that containment of Bonn was necessary because there was an inevitable, though implicit, conflict of interest between West Germany and its allies. The Germans could not help but yearn for reunification, the belief ran, and so someday Bonn might accept a deal from Moscow by which West Germany would leave NATO in return for reunion with East Germany. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the US headed off this danger by making itself Bonn's closest partner in the negotiations leading to reunification. This positioning bolstered Washington's authority to insist that a united Germany remain in NATO.

The tumultuous changes of 1989–90 also reawakened fears that had earlier motivated the German policy of President Kennedy and others. Kennedy feared that a mass uprising – in the form of a popular revolt in East Germany or a successful demagogic political campaign in West Germany – could overturn European stability. In June 1963, the President travelled to West Berlin and to the FRG partly to counter the rival attractions of French President Charles de Gaulle. More important to Kennedy, however, was the goal of reaffirming American ties with those Germans who might resign themselves to neutrality or to Communist domination out of frustration with the Berlin Wall. Trying to reinforce the emotional linkage between West Berliners and the West, Kennedy made his famous declaration: 'All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin [therefore] ... I take pride in the words "Ich bin ein Berliner."' The huge crowd roared its approval. Kennedy, who had purposely evoked this response, interpreted the mass reaction as 'exciting but also disturbing'. He feared that if he had said, 'March to the Wall – tear it down', the Berliners would have obeyed. Kennedy's assessment of the

²⁰ 'Remarks of Secretary [Dulles] at Opening Session of Western European Chiefs', 9 May 1958, Box 137, John Foster Dulles Papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton. Pencilled in later was the qualifying remark that having Germany in the Soviet bloc was 'clearly not acceptable', but it appears from this document that Dulles's spoken words did not include that qualifier.

²¹ Memorandum by David Bruce, 9 Feb. 1963, Box 49–56, Theodore Sorensen Papers, Kennedy Library.

sentiment in West Berlin reflected long-standing American stereotypes about the German people. The speech had, the President concluded, 'unlocked [the Germans'] irrationality and repressed hysteria'.²² Equally unable to forget Germany's past, President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1966 told Prime Minister Harold Wilson that his 'overwhelming interest was to make sure that the Germans did not get us into World War III'. If the Western alliance did not 'tie the Germans in there was some 17-year-old right now in Germany who would be a 20-year-old little Hitler in another three years'.²³ Johnson's policy was to 'have them [the Germans] by my side where I can count on them and where I can watch them'.²⁴

It became particularly important to 'watch' the West Germans as they began reaching out for closer ties with East Germany and Eastern Europe under the policy of *Ostpolitik* initiated by Willy Brandt and carried forward under Helmut Schmidt and Helmut Kohl. A key element in American-German relations during the détente era was attempts by the US to head off what Henry Kissinger feared as a 'race to Moscow' by Bonn, Paris and other allies attempting to improve relations with the Soviets. By the late 1980s as the mini-Cold War of 1979–86 drew to a close, the increase in West Germany's power and the rise of Gorbachev's appeal meant that very often Bonn, not Washington, was setting the pace for détente. When Gorbachev surprised American negotiators by accepting the zero-zero solution for intermediate range missiles (INF) in Europe, the Reagan Administration, despite some misgivings from hardliners, had to remove the missiles or risk losing West Germany. As a senior American official put it, 'the Germans are just so central to everything and so distrusted'.²⁵ Ambassador Richard Burt warned that if the INF treaty died in the Senate (as had the SALT II treaty), West Germans would feel 'that they had lost a reliable partner in the United States'. Burt feared that Germans both 'on the left . . . and on the conservative side [might] . . . seek some kind of alternative security arrangement with . . . the East'.²⁶ Such American apprehensions paralleled persistent West German worries that Washington might either sell out German interests in a deal with Moscow or incinerate the FRG in a nuclear war.

Most of these apprehensions had remained muted because leaders in the United States and in West Germany – as well as in other nations of NATO – tried to maintain a veneer of unanimity and friendship in the face of a shared Communist enemy. American officials and their Atlantic-minded European counterparts also tended to downplay inter-allied distrust and rivalry in their public statements so as to sustain broad popular support for the Western alliance. In sum, the historical context for the tumultuous events of 1989–90 was forty years of close association and closet distrust between the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany.

²² Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Note on Conversation with Richard E. Neustadt, 10 July 1964, Box W-12, Arthur M. Schlesinger Papers, Kennedy Library.

²³ McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum for the Record, 7 Dec. 1964, Box 18–19, Files of McGeorge Bundy, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas.

²⁴ Arthur Krock, 'Memorandum of Conversation with Lyndon B. Johnson, 15 December 1964', Box 1, Arthur Krock Papers, Mudd Library.

²⁵ *New York Times*, 21 Jan. 1988.

²⁶ FRC, *The INF Treaty*, 100th Cong., 2nd sess., Part 2, 1–5 Feb. 1988, 186.

In keeping with America's post-war policy, the Bush Administration tried to embrace the Germans more closely so as to keep them aligned with Washington and render them less able to make an independent deal with Moscow.

The United States and the Prospect of German Unification

During the transition from Reagan to Bush, Zoellick wrote papers for Baker that warned of growing problems with Germany: Gorbachev's rising popularity in the FRG; the passing away of the post-war generation of Germans (the age cohort most accustomed to following US leadership); and mounting resentment over NATO military manoeuvres, low-flying aircraft and the concentration of nuclear weapons in the densely populated nation. Like Eagleburger, Zoellick viewed such problems as a challenge to Washington's skills: 'How do we manage this critical relationship in changed circumstances?' he asked.²⁷ Bush offered a partial answer at the May 1989 NATO summit when he signalled that as America's 'partner in leadership', West Germany would replace Great Britain as Washington's principal European ally. Like Bush, most of the officials who controlled policy towards Germany – namely, Baker, Zoellick, Blackwill, State Department policy planning director Dennis Ross and Robert M. Kimmitt, also a policy planning staff director and later ambassador to Germany – confidently believed that they could manage the FRG and keep it in NATO and close to the US. Other top officials, less trusting of the Germans and more worried that Moscow might lure Bonn out of the Western alliance, included National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, former CIA official and Soviet expert Robert Gates and Raymond Seitz, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs and a key strategist in the unification negotiations.²⁸

Given American officials' customary public emphasis on the smiling aspects of the US–German relations, their decades-long verbal commitment to German unity and the Bush Administration's policy of 'partnership in leadership', Seitz in October 1989 offered striking testimony at a Congressional hearing: 'the history of the 20th century is a history in which a unified Germany has led to instability and that, in turn to war', he asserted.²⁹ Seitz and other officials did not oppose German unification so much as they feared the uncertainty and chaos that might arise from it. Seitz's worry expressed not just Washington's general concern with international order but also the particular apprehensions of some Americans about Germany. Seitz viewed the spectre of a war arising from Germany as an unlikely, yet nevertheless real, danger.

More pressing was the threat that a united Germany could destabilise Europe in other ways. In late 1989 and early 1990 some American officials, like their predecessors, feared that an independent and more powerful Germany might overthrow or

²⁷ Quoted in Szabo, *German Unification*, 11.

²⁸ For further discussion of the bureaucratic and personal differences, see Pond, *Beyond*, 162–7.

²⁹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East (thereafter CFA, Europe), *Developments in Europe, October 1989*, 101st Cong., 1st sess., 3 Oct. 1989, 14.

attenuate the bonds of NATO and the EC, reduce Washington's influence in Western Europe, revive claims for territories lost in the Second World War or in other ways scare the central and Eastern Europeans back into Moscow's embrace, or undermine Gorbachev's shaky grip in the Soviet Union. Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs, warned about German 'emotions, which are running high, and may run amok'.³⁰ Like President Kennedy at the Berlin Wall, Senator Carl Levin of Michigan dreaded uncontrolled crowds of Germans. If unification 'occur[s] on the streets in a precipitous way', Levin worried, that 'will make everybody very nervous indeed'.³¹ George F. Kennan, the father of Soviet containment, urged a three-year moratorium on German unification and looked for 'some great European center of coordination and guidance' to contain 'German energies'.³²

When the Berlin Wall suddenly opened on 9 November 1989, Bush and other top officials did not know whether and how they could manage this new challenge. The administration responded publicly with the obligatory rhetoric about freedom and democracy – and privately with a 'sombre' sense 'that very thorny questions now had to be faced', observed a journalist with close ties to Baker.³³ Bush lamely told reporters, 'I'm elated ... I'm just not an emotional kind of guy'.³⁴ An administration official described the new situation as one 'where both the U.S. and the Soviet Union have lost influence and where they have things coming down around their ears'.³⁵

With regard to the prospect of German unification, Bush faced a dilemma. As Kissinger emphasised at a White House dinner on 13 November, 'if the Germans see us as obstructing their aspirations, we'd pay a price later on'.³⁶ On the other hand, Moscow's loss of East Germany could undermine Gorbachev's already shaky support at home and doom his liberalising reforms. If forced to choose between the success of *perestroika* and German unity in the near future, Bush said he would choose *perestroika*: 'That's what's driving the things we like in Soviet foreign policy'.³⁷ Informed that Vernon Walters, the US ambassador in Bonn, had boldly predicted reunification 'within five years', Bush looked anguished.³⁸ Like his predecessors, Bush also thought that German neutralisation was too high a price to pay for German unification.³⁹

On 17 November, Bush telephoned Kohl to warn against any expansive 'rhetoric about reunification or a time plan for completely tearing down the wall'.⁴⁰

³⁰ US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Future of Europe*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., 17 Jan. 1990 (hereafter US Senate, *Future*), 79.

³¹ US Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Threat Assessment; Military Strategy; and Operational Requirements*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., 25 Jan. 1990, 229.

³² US Senate, *Future*, 80.

³³ Drew, 'Letter', Vol. 65 (27 Nov. 1989), 130–1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 131. See also *Washington Post*, 10, 12 Nov. 1989.

³⁶ Quoted in Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbot, *At The Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993 (thereafter Beschloss, Talbot, *Highest Levels*), 138.

³⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 169.

³⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 169.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴⁰ Teltschik, 329 *Tage*, 36.

Also in this conversation Bush and Kohl, while pledging close consultation, seemed to take a short step away from each other, perhaps to preserve freedom of action in the highly turbulent situation. The President told the Chancellor that it was impossible to meet in Europe for consultation in the two weeks before the planned 2–3 December summit with Gorbachev in Malta, to which Kohl replied that, alas, he could not come to Washington.⁴¹ Although both leaders operated under tight schedules, in the context of their otherwise frequent meetings and Kohl's previous readiness to fly to Washington, this was significant. Just as Bush may have been reluctant to commit himself to the Germans before meeting with Gorbachev, Kohl may have wanted more leeway to move on German unity, particularly because of past criticism that he was a tool of the Americans. Despite this distancing, the main thrust of US policy remained the traditional one of closely co-operating with and subtly supervising the Germans by being their trusted and most powerful friend, that is, by keeping a firm 'arm around the shoulder' of the FRG.

Kohl Asserts His Leadership in the German Question

Although none of the four principal victor powers greeted warmly the sudden prospect of German reunification, they could not, together or singly, do much to stop it. The rusted prerogatives from the Second World War and the putative influence from having armies stationed in the two Germanys proved to be instruments too blunt to manipulate the rush of events. Any pressure on Bonn would be heavy-handed, would alienate the future united Germany and would probably prove counterproductive, particularly because the average citizens of East Germany had become a powerful force in the swirl of events. As the GDR's authority and *raison d'être* melted away, no non-German government could do much about the rising number of East German residents moving to the West or calling for reunification.⁴²

Into this maelstrom, Kohl moved decisively. He seized the chance to advance German unification and hitched that historic cause to the Christian Democratic Party. Kohl's party faced an uphill election fight in December 1990 and feared losing voters to the ultranationalist Republican Party. Kohl also felt pressure from other Bonn politicians who asked, as one of Kohl's aides put it, 'Where is the master plan?'.⁴³ The Chancellor was emboldened on 21 November, when his national security adviser, Horst Teltschik, received word from a visiting high-level Soviet official that Moscow could give a 'green light' to a variety of alternatives, including a confederation of the two Germanys. Teltschik advised Kohl that if even the Soviets were discussing the possibility of reunification, 'then it was high time that we no longer keep this locked up in a closet, but go on the offensive'.⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See Elizabeth Pond, 'A World Destroyed. The Dynamics of German Unification in the GDR', (thereafter Pond, 'World') *International Security*, Vol. 15 (1990), 35–66; Manfred Rexin, 'Die DDR auf dem Wege nach Deutschland', *Aussenpolitik*, Vol. 41, no. 4 (1990), 317–25.

⁴³ Szabo, *German Unification*, 39.

⁴⁴ Teltschik, 329 *Tage*, 44.

On 28 November, Kohl went on the offensive with a carefully crafted speech. The Chancellor quickly genuflected before NATO, the EC and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), and then went on to outline a ten-point plan that made unification a matter for Germans to decide without guidance from the four victor powers or from any international organisation. By suggesting a series of steps – beginning with joint commissions established by the two sovereign German states, moving on to stages of ‘confederal structures’ and ending with eventual ‘state unity’ – Kohl normalised reunification, that is, he defined it and shaped it as a realisable, natural goal that other nations should accept and that East Germans could achieve without emigrating to West Germany (and thereby overburdening housing and social services in the FRG).⁴⁵

Subsequent debate by analysts focused on whether Kohl intended to accelerate the unification process, as observers in other countries immediately charged, or to decelerate the development and make it orderly, as some analysts later asserted.⁴⁶ But this controversy misses the key point that Kohl, by means of this speech and his subsequent actions, channelled towards himself and the Christian Democrats the power arising from the millions of East Germans intent on achieving a quick improvement in their lives. In the ensuing months, Kohl would repeatedly tell Bush, Gorbachev and others that he, too, opposed rapid German unification. Yet if one accepts Kohl’s description of the unification process as a ‘primal wave’ (*Grundwelle*), it is clear that he opened the sluiceways.⁴⁷ The Chancellor’s speech of 28 November, like his later offer to East Germans of monetary union on favourable terms and his interventions in the GDR elections of March 1990, ensured that East Germans would act in ways that accelerated unification. As Kohl liked to say, the prudent farmer brings his harvest into the barn as quickly as possible.⁴⁸ Two years after these events, Kohl remembered that his policy was to ‘move things along at ... [a] terrific pace’ because ‘there were only a very few weeks during which we had this opportunity’.⁴⁹

Kohl’s decisions not to consult with Bush or other western leaders before the speech, not to mention anything about the rights of the four powers in the address, and not to offer reassurances to Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union about a united Germany’s renunciation of territories lost in the Second World War – plus the timing of the speech a few days before the Bush–Gorbachev summit – all signalled that Bonn could play its own hand when it wanted to do so. Peter R. Weilemann, a Christian Democratic analyst well connected to the Bonn Government, explained that because of the ‘Western allies’ indecisive watchfulness

⁴⁵ Kaiser, *Deutschlands Vereinigung*, 158–68.

⁴⁶ See Kaiser, ‘Unification’, 184; Pond, *Beyond*, 22–3. In Pond’s more detailed analysis, ‘World’, 56–7, she accepts the Kohl Government’s explanation that it wanted to slow down events while acknowledging that perhaps Bonn officials promulgated this interpretation knowing that it was what other nations wanted to hear. Szabo, *German Unification*, 38–40, delineates the details of Kohl’s decisive action, but underestimates its significance.

⁴⁷ Teltchik, 329 *Tage*, 63.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 239, 243.

⁴⁹ Helmut Kohl Interview, ‘Assessing the Unification Process in Retrospect’, German Information Center (New York), *Statements and Speeches*, Vol. 15, no. 12 (13 Aug. 1992).

and inclination to act as if nothing had happened' after the opening of the Wall, the German Government had to 'put its cards on the table in order to show that it did not have a bad hand but did not want to bid any higher either'.⁵⁰ Of course, Bonn now did not have to do much bidding at all; the insistently expectant East Germans did that for Kohl and Genscher, while the latter could decide how to play the cards. The speech of 28 November, and the foreign backlash it sparked, also secured Kohl's credentials as a German nationalist, an asset for the Chancellor in view of the rising support for the ultranationalist Republicans, the elections scheduled for December 1990 and past criticism of Kohl for being too subservient to the Americans.

When the NATO leaders first gathered in Brussels after the Malta superpower summit, Kohl 'did not have an easy time of it', Weilemann observed. But Kohl and Genscher were now ready, after the Chancellor had struck the pose of a twentieth-century Bismarck, to soothe the anxieties and meet the needs of the Western allies and of the Soviet Union. And so Kohl and Genscher joined France in pushing for more rapid integration in the EC, pacified America by promising to remain within NATO, pledged to help the Soviet Union by extending economic assistance and pushing for a stronger CSCE, and put forth the Genscher Plan, by which NATO troops would not be stationed in former GDR territory after reunification.

Bush Administration officials were receptive to the Chancellor's making amends, in part because they judged him and his Christian Democratic Party the most loyal to NATO and thus the American favourite in the German election to be held in December 1990. The likely Social Democratic candidate for Chancellor, Oskar Lafontaine, appeared to US leaders as dangerously ambivalent about German devotion to NATO, while even Genscher of the splinter Free Democrats talked at times (particularly when he was away from Kohl) about a less Atlanticist Germany and Europe.⁵¹ Determined to stay securely by Kohl's side, Bush employed the 'arm around the shoulder' tactic when he reported to the Chancellor on the Malta superpower summit. The President related that, when Gorbachev had complained that the Germans were moving too fast, he had countered that he 'knew Kohl, and knew that he [Kohl] would not rush things'. Bush had promised Gorbachev, the American told Kohl pointedly, that 'nothing unrealistic would happen'; everything would be 'well-considered'.⁵² Bush's message to Kohl was clear: we are with you, but you had better be careful.

As German sentiment for unification mounted, on 12 December 1989 Baker delivered a major address in West Berlin that laid out both Washington's conception of post-Wall Atlantic relationships and its conditions for unification. Entitled 'A New Europe, a New Atlanticism: Architecture for a New Era', the speech updated Washington's traditional policy, going back to the Marshall Plan, of

⁵⁰ Peter R. Weilemann, 'The German Contribution Toward Overcoming the Division of Europe – Chancellor Helmut Kohl's 10 Points', *Aussenpolitik*, Vol. 41, no. 1 (1990), 18.

⁵¹ Moens, 'Diplomacy', 532, 536; Teltschik, 329 *Tage*, 182–3. Meeting in Moscow in Feb. 1990, Gorbachev and Lafontaine agreed that a united Germany should not be in NATO. See Laird, *Soviets*, 170.

⁵² Teltschik, 329 *Tage*, 62. See also *ibid.*, 65.

encouraging the European allies to build a united Western Europe within an Atlantic framework, thereby sustaining US leadership. 'We will create a New Europe on the basis of a new Atlanticism,' the Secretary of State declared, affirming that 'NATO will remain North America's primary link with Europe'. Baker sketched Washington's blueprint for a strengthened NATO, buttressed with additional political responsibilities. Alongside this modernised NATO, he envisaged the European Community as a lesser edifice, but a structure still useful for anchoring West Germany. Like Zoellick and other officials, the Secretary of State wanted to establish 'institutional and consultative links' between Washington and the EC, that is, a recognised American voice in EC councils as the Europeans made their decisions.⁵³ As a senior American official explained this issue, Washington objected to the Europeans in the Community who 'only want to talk to us when they feel like it. We want to commit them to come to the table'.⁵⁴ (Some Europeans, particularly the French, retorted by asking why the Americans should have a seat at the European table at all.) After commenting on the EC, Baker discussed the CSCE (which included almost all the nations of Europe plus Canada and the US) in terms suggesting an airy forum that would busy itself with tasks such as promoting markets and free elections in Eastern Europe and assisting in confidence-building measures between East-West military forces – while leaving the most serious political discussions and military security issues to NATO, in which the United States exercised the commanding role. Baker's effort to subordinate the CSCE came in response to the many proposals floated in 1989–90 by Europeans, including Genscher and Gorbachev, that the CSCE might develop into a security institution to rival NATO. (In 1990–1, Baker would marshal a similar effort to restrict the importance and independence of the Western European Union from NATO.)⁵⁵

U.S. Reliance on NATO in Post-Cold War Europe

Maintaining NATO's pre-eminence became even more important as the accelerating thaw in East-West tensions undermined America's importance and authority in Western Europe. Bush did not appear thrilled then Gorbachev, after the Malta summit, announced to admiring throngs that the Cold War had ended. Sure,

⁵³ US Department of State, 'A New Europe, a New Atlanticism: Architecture for a New Era' (hereafter State Dept. 'New Atlanticism'), 12 Dec. 1989, Current Policy no. 1233.

⁵⁴ *Economist*, 7 July 1990, 6.

⁵⁵ The Republican right had long suspected the CSCE because of its origins in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the détente policies of the 1970s, against which Ronald Reagan had railed and campaigned. The case for a stronger CSCE is found in James E. Goodby, 'A New European Concert: Settling Disputes in CSCE', *Arms Control Today*, Vol. 21 (1991), 3–6; Harald Mueller, 'A United Nations of Europe and North America', *ibid.*, 3, 6–8. For Genscher's lobbying in Washington on behalf of the CSCE, see *The German Tribune*, 15 Apr. 1990, 1–2. The relationship among NATO, the EC and CSCE is discussed in Gerd Langguth, 'Germany, the EC and the Architecture of Europe. The German Question in the Context of the EC', *Aussenpolitik*, Vol. 42, no. 2 (1991), 137–45; Hans Binnendijk, 'The Emerging European Security Order', *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 14 (1991), 67–80. For Baker's opposition to making the Western European Union more independent of NATO, see *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 Apr. 1991.

tensions had eased, Bush admitted to a journalist, 'but if I signal to you there's no Cold War, then you'll say, "Well, what are you doing with troops in Europe?"'. I mean, come on! When a persistent reporter asked the President, 'What role do we really have to play here? We don't live on this continent', Bush struggled, 'Well, I'm not sure ... I'm ...', then went on simply to declare that 'the United States must stay involved'.⁵⁶ In the next few months, the Bush Administration offered a more articulate response, a strategic concept that predicated America's global position on its political and military leadership of NATO.

Testifying before Congress on 3 April 1990, James F. Dobbins, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, made a telling statement when he declared: 'We need NATO now for the same reasons NATO was created' in 1949.⁵⁷ He explained that there remained the risk – now admittedly remote – of Soviet military pressure or aggression. But even though the Soviet threat had lessened, NATO's importance to the stability of Europe had grown. Dobbins warned that without the 'glue' of the integrated military command and American leadership in NATO, Western Europeans would revert to their bad habits, that is, they would renationalise their armed forces, play the 'old geopolitical game' and 'shift alliances'.⁵⁸ The State Department's key assumption here was that, without the United States, Western Europeans – particularly with Germany united – were incapable of preserving stability among themselves. Unless the US acted as the 'gyroscope', European squabbling would 'undermine political and economic structures like the EC', and the quarrelling could even lead to a resumption of 'historic conflicts' like the two world wars.⁵⁹

Bush Administration officials also believed that a robust US military role through NATO, particularly with nuclear weapons, helped counter any German temptations to develop a full panoply of modern armaments. As Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz put it, American military strength in NATO enabled moderate German governments to argue: 'Our security needs are met in an arrangement with our friends, and we don't have to do the things on our own which would be particularly disturbing in the modern age.'⁶⁰ By integrating the German army into the NATO command and by pre-empting Germany from developing a more ambitious military capability, American leadership in NATO helped contain both the Germans and other Europeans' fears of the Germans.

NATO also buttressed Washington's overall leadership in Europe. Since its creation, NATO had operated as a military alliance with a political function, namely to cement the strategic, political, economic, cultural and personal ties that had usually lined up Germany, the other European allies, the US Congress and the American people behind policies set largely by the administration in Washington.

⁵⁶ *New York Times*, 5 Dec. 1989.

⁵⁷ US Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords* (thereafter US Congress, *Implementation*) 101st Cong., 2nd sess., 3 Apr. 1990, 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8, 18.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 18; FRC, *The Future of NATO*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., 9 Feb. 1990, 19.

⁶⁰ US House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, *Building a Defense that Works for the Post-Cold War World*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., 22, 28 Feb., 14, 21, 22, 27 March, 25 Apr. 1990, 115.

All through the Cold War, dread of the Soviet Union had obscured NATO's role as a vehicle for American national interests in Europe, but as that threat melted away, NATO's underlying political purpose stood starkly revealed. In May 1990, Wolfowitz argued that, even if the Soviets withdrew all their troops from Eastern Europe and even if Moscow no longer menaced Western Europe, a significant number of American soldiers, preferably armed with nuclear weapons, had to remain in Europe in order to 'make [American] leadership work'.⁶¹ Seitz agreed that 'NATO is not predicated on the continued existence of the Warsaw Pact or any specific level of threat from the East', and he went on to explain that the alliance remained so valuable in part because it gave the United States an institution through which to 'play an active role in shaping the emerging political and security architecture of Europe'.⁶² Senator Biden dramatically argued that the political benefits of stationing American troops in Germany outweighed the gains of freeing Eastern and central Europe from Moscow's military occupation. If the Soviet troop withdrawal inspired the Germans to cry 'Yankees, go home', Biden would respond, he claimed, 'Bring back the Russians. Bring back the Russians.' Much worse than another Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, the senator declared, would be the 'Germans saying, so long', or the 'SPD saying nuclear-free Germany, if they gain power'.⁶³ As these comments suggested, Washington worried that with the dependable crisis of the Cold War coming to an end, US predominance in Western Europe might also melt away.

Finally, NATO not only helped contain the Soviets and the allies, it also limited isolationist impulses arising from the US Congress and from the American people by institutionalising and solidifying America's military involvement in Western Europe. NATO made that engagement appear more natural and acceptable to the average American because a US general commanded the structure. 'Without NATO,' Dobbins feared, 'U.S. public and Congressional support for this engagement would be difficult to maintain.' Yet a significant proportion of people in Congress, and an even higher percentage of their constituents, did not share or did not understand the Bush Administration's arguments for continuing to station American troops in prosperous, post-Cold War Western Europe.⁶⁴

Negotiations and Unification:

Two Plus Four, London, Houston, and the Caucasus

Attuned to the US focus on NATO, Kohl and Genscher in December 1989–January 1990 repeatedly promised Washington that a united Germany would remain in the alliance regardless of Soviet protests. Largely in response to these assurances, Bush Administration officials by late January 1990 shifted from a policy of public endorsement of reunification with private reservations and warnings to the Germans to go slowly, to a stance of assisting and managing the apparently

⁶¹ FRC, *The Future of Europe*, 606.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 148.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 598.

⁶⁴ US Congress, *Implementation*, 8.

inevitable development. 'German reunification is going to happen,' explained a top US official; 'the more you resist it, the more likely you are to create the kind of Germany you don't want – resentful, angry.'⁶⁵ The administration's 'top priority', Seitz testified, had become 'managing the transition that is going on in Europe' so that the changes 'do not impair the continued American presence in Europe'.⁶⁶ Zoellick believed that pushing for rapid unification 'was the right thing to do, a slam dunk. A U.S. leadership role would also enable us to better achieve our interests.'⁶⁷ As Bush saw it, the United States had to remain Germany's first friend if it wanted American troops to remain welcome on the territory of a united Germany.⁶⁸

In his December speech in Berlin, Baker had laid out four conditions for German unification: that the coming together be based on self-determination; that Germany remain committed to NATO and to the EC; that unification be 'peaceful, gradual, and part of a step-by-step process'; and that border questions be governed by the Helsinki Final Act, which recognised the inviolability of frontiers.⁶⁹ Speaking to reporters, Baker stressed the continued responsibility of the four Second World War victor powers in enforcing these conditions.⁷⁰ By endorsing the authority of the four powers, Baker in effect strengthened Washington's leverage in Bonn. Officials in Moscow, Paris and London had already expressed concerns about German unification in loud and negative tones. Despite its own initial anxieties, the Bush Administration stood out as the government most accepting of German unification, as Bonn's most dependable and most powerful friend, and hence as Germany's interlocutor with the other three victor powers.

Relations between Washington and Bonn became particularly close after early February, when the United States pushed to establish the two plus four talks on German unification. These negotiations squelched suggestions by the Soviets and the British of convening a Second World War conference, in which Germany would again sit in the dock as a defeated nation liable for reparations and other claims. Baker graphically demonstrated his diplomatic priorities by first clearing the two plus four plan with the West Germans, then brushing aside objections from the Soviets, French and British.⁷¹ Designed primarily by Baker's deputies Seitz, Zoellick and Ross and Genscher's deputy Frank Elbe, two plus four provided for the two Germanys to negotiate with each other on the domestic aspects of unification (of course, Bonn would dominate these talks) and to negotiate with the four major victor powers on the international aspects, particularly on the key issue of united Germany's relationship with NATO.

Baker's team intended the two plus four format to channel the unification

⁶⁵ Drew, 'Letter', Vol. 66 (19 Mar. 1990), 104.

⁶⁶ CFA, Europe, *Developments in Europe, March 1990*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., 22 Mar. 1990, 17.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Pond, *Beyond*, 161.

⁶⁸ Teltschik, 329 *Tage*, 300.

⁶⁹ State Dept. 'New Atlanticism'.

⁷⁰ *New York Times*, 11 Dec. 1989.

⁷¹ Gilbert Gornig, 'Die vertragliche Regelung der mit der deutschen Vereinigung auswärtigen Probleme', *Aussenpolitik*, Vol. 42, no. 1 (1991), 3–12; *New York Times*, 16 Feb. 1990; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 12 Feb. 1990.

process and to contain, in a light-handed manner, the Germans and the Soviets. The format played to Baker's managerial skills, his 'uncanny sense of how you get people to do what you want them to do', as an admirer described it.⁷² Above all, a key State Department official explained, two plus four would 'avoid a one plus one', that is a Soviet-German deal struck without the West.⁷³ Varying the metaphor, Blackwill described the 'Western cocoon' around the Chancellor: 'If ever he is confronted with the choice of leaving NATO or else breaking with the Russians, Kohl will be surrounded. There will be a Western chorus standing beside him saying, "We're with you."'⁷⁴

After the formal two plus four negotiations commenced in mid-March, the Western powers did 'stand beside' the Germans, particularly in the subset of talks dubbed by Americans one plus three. US officials regarded one plus three – that is, the informal conversations between Bonn on the one hand and Washington, London and Paris on the other – as the most important parleys, because they effected a kind of double containment of Moscow and Bonn. In one plus three, the four Western powers arrived at a common position to present to the Soviets, while the Americans, French and British indicated to the Germans what was acceptable in Bonn's negotiations with Moscow. As a US participant explained, one plus three 'prevented Genscher from cutting a quick deal' with the Soviets.⁷⁵ The various sets of talks that made up two plus four also provided a mechanism for including, at least in a nominal way, the British and French while excluding the smaller Second World War allies, who might have presented claims against Germany. Finally, two plus four offered what one national security council official called 'a means for managing Soviet concerns' about losing East Germany. In sum, the two plus four mechanism appealed to the Americans' confidence that they could 'manage' the others, particularly the Germans and Soviets.⁷⁶ And yet, after Bonn had secured Washington's wholehearted commitment to unification in January 1990, the Germans' most important remaining negotiation – despite the attempted containment by two plus four and by one plus three – was with the Soviets. Given the underlying circumstances that Bonn needed Soviet assent to Germany's unification and remaining in NATO and that Moscow needed money, which the Germans were able and willing to supply, could Washington's adept managers remain the privileged interlocutors between the Germans and the Soviets?

The Americans soon found that with their 'arm around the shoulder' of the Germans, Kohl and Genscher could steer the US. An example was the issue of American short-range nuclear missiles in the FRG. Although the Americans wanted to retain and 'modernise' these weapons, growing numbers of Germans found them unnecessary and objectionable. In contrast to 1983, when Kohl had endured

⁷² Quoted in Szabo, *German Unification*, 18.

⁷³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Beschloss, Talbott, *Highest Levels*, 188.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Szabo, *German Unification*, 71.

⁷⁶ More dubious about the prospect of influencing Soviet behaviour in the two negotiations, the National Security Council at first opposed allowing Moscow to participate in two plus four. See Pond, *Beyond* 180–1.

considerable domestic criticism by accepting intermediate-range American missiles, by 1990 he had different priorities. On 24 February, shortly after speaking with Gorbachev, the Chancellor urged Bush to remove the short-range missiles. When Bush suggested that the missiles should remain until 1992, Kohl replied that 'above all else, he wanted Bush to retain the initiative [on this matter] and not in the end have to yield to pressure from Germany or from anywhere else'.⁷⁷ The message was clear: Kohl would follow Bush's lead, but only so long as the US led in the proper direction, in this case by removing the short-range missiles, which, in May 1990, Bush agreed to do.⁷⁸

On 17 May 1990, Kohl coupled his multiple assurances to Bush that 'there is no substitute' for the continued membership of Germany in NATO with his assertions that: (1) the 'alliance had to adapt to developments' in the improved East-West climate; (2) the West had to do much more to assist the faltering Soviet economy; and (3) mushrooming domestic problems in the Soviet Union made it imperative that Bush shape the late May superpower summit in Washington so as to bolster Gorbachev's public image.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the Germans promised billions in credits to Moscow, prompting a 'euphoric reaction' from Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, Genscher related to Kohl.⁸⁰ In subsequent conversations with Bush, Kohl repeated his pledge to NATO while arguing Gorbachev's brief on the need for aid, to which the American answered that, because of budgetary restraints, Congressional opposition, Soviet aid to Cuba and repression in Lithuania, Washington could not do much for Moscow.⁸¹

And yet, the Americans could not hold to a hard line on Soviet aid and on East-West security issues if they wanted to retain German support and to secure Germany's membership in NATO after reunification. In late May, when Gorbachev was in Washington, the Bush Administration, at German urging, informally gave the Soviet leader 'nine assurances', promising that united Germany would remain non-nuclear, limit its armed forces, renounce lost territory, pay for Soviet troops remaining short term in the former GDR and extend economic assistance to Moscow; while NATO would negotiate on short-range nuclear weapons, shift to a less threatening nuclear strategy, not station alliance forces in the former GDR and accept a role for the CSCE.⁸² At the NATO summit of 5-6 July in London, Bush made good on many of these promises. In response to German and Soviet arguments (shortly before the summit, Shevardnadze had repeated to Baker four times that a change in NATO's military doctrine was essential) and reflecting changed thinking within his administration, the President now formally acknowledged the end of the Cold War, urged abandonment of the forward defence posture so as to make the alliance less threatening to the Soviet Union, accepted withdrawal of nuclear artillery shells, suggested a non-aggression pact with the Warsaw Pact nations and promised a new, more defensive nuclear doctrine. Bush pledged that

⁷⁷ Teltschik, 329 *Tage*, 160.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 236-9. Similarly, Kohl, on 6 Sept. urged Bush to 'do everything he could to make sure that the upcoming Helsinki summit would be a success for Gorbachev too'. *Ibid.*, 358.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 262, 305, 336-7.

⁸² Szabo, *German Unification*, 86.

NATO's nuclear weapons would now become 'truly weapons of last resort'. This historic change, foreshadowed by the decades-long deterioration in Washington's nuclear credibility, pleased the West Germans and Soviets, but angered French and British leaders, who had contributed little to Washington's decision making. Paris still trusted in nuclear deterrence rather than in nuclear or conventional war-fighting. France would not be bound by the NATO decision, François Mitterrand declared, for 'we do not share the concept of last resort'.⁸³

While still clinging to nuclear deterrence against the Soviet Union, Mitterrand supported Kohl's effort to support the seriously sagging Soviet economy. At the economic summit in Houston of 9–11 July 1990, Kohl argued that the leading industrial democracies had to undertake a multi-billion aid programme for the Soviets. Bush opposed such a massive undertaking, having neither the money for Moscow nor the stomach for the Congressional fight such an aid bill would probably spark. And yet, a senior administration official warned, 'the United States cannot be ... isolated on this issue' or it would lose its leadership position in the alliance.⁸⁴ With insufficient financial and political capital to exercise leadership, Washington could do little to 'manage' the allies on this crucial matter. The allies each went their own way, with most of the Europeans (except the British) trailing behind the Germans.

Also at Houston, Scowcroft and Teltschik discussed strategy for winning Soviet assent to a united Germany's remaining in NATO. The two agreed that when Kohl went to Moscow in the next week, he would take with him the fruits (such as they were) of the London and Houston summits and the further enticement of a commitment by Bonn to limit the total armed forces of a united Germany. The US wanted Bonn to negotiate on its own with Moscow on the German troop cutback and to tie that reduction to the Soviets' military withdrawal from Eastern Germany. Otherwise, Scowcroft feared, Moscow might set up a linkage between both superpowers' troops in Germany, thereby generating pressure in the FRG (where increasing numbers doubted that they wanted the GIs to stay) for a US military pull out – and that would devastate Washington's strategy for maintaining its influence in Western Europe.⁸⁵

On 15–16 July in Gorbachev's homeland in the Caucasus, Kohl settled on troop levels with the Soviet leader, but the consequences and intimacy of their talks went far beyond what the Americans had anticipated. In the weeks before this summit, German and Soviet diplomats had negotiated intensively; Genscher talked with Shevardnadze for over sixty hours, including two meetings in June alone.⁸⁶ Despite US confidence that the two plus four and one plus three formats would 'manage' the Germans, Bonn did not keep the Americans closely informed. As one US diplomat observed, 'We are getting more detailed reports from the Soviets on their meetings than we are getting from the Germans.'⁸⁷ When Gorbachev invited the

⁸³ *Washington Post*, 7 July 1990; 'London Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance, 6 July 1990', *Survival*, Vol. 32, no. 5 (1990), 469–72.

⁸⁴ *New York Times*, 28 June 1990; *Die Welt*, 12 July 1990.

⁸⁶ Szabo, *German Unification*, 81; Pond, *Beyond*, 217–18.

⁸⁵ Teltschik, 329 *Tage*, 307.

⁸⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*

Chancellor to his home, Kohl and Teltschik concluded that a final deal was at hand, but they did not share this assessment with their American friends.⁸⁸ Amidst the natural splendor of Stavropol, Arkhyz and Zheleznovodsk, Gorbachev dropped his last objections to German reunification, to Germany's regaining full sovereignty and to Germany's remaining in NATO. In return, Kohl pledged to limit Bundeswehr forces to 370,000 and to step up efforts to enlist Western (not least German) capital and other assistance for the worsening Soviet economy. In particular, a united Germany would pay the costs of resettling in the USSR the 360,000 remaining Soviet troops in the GDR's territory, assume the economic and financial obligations of the GDR and extend billions of new credits to Moscow. Gorbachev stressed the importance of special relations between Germany and Russia (not between Germany and the Soviet Union, Teltschik observed), and Kohl responded with the promise of comprehensive co-operation to be detailed in a new treaty, which in fact was initialled in September 1990.

Thus only a few days after Bush, at the London conference, and Mitterrand, at the Houston conference, had gone out of their way to help Kohl by pushing for measures designed to win Moscow's acquiescence to German unity and full sovereignty, Kohl was in Gorbachev's home town negotiating far-reaching accords that impinged on the interest of the Western allies. The *Economist's* headline, 'Encounter at Stavrapallo', exaggerated the parallel with the German-Soviet pact of 1922, but the accord did suggest that Bonn and Moscow could come together in ways that sidetracked the Western allies.⁸⁹ The Americans, British and French had expected eventually to relinquish their rights, stemming from post-Second World War agreements, to garrison troops in West Berlin; in the Caucasus, Kohl announced that the Western allies would leave Berlin when the Soviets withdrew from East Germany. Kohl and Gorbachev promised that neither of their nations would initiate a military attack on the other, a pledge that ran counter to the obligation of the FRG to come to the defence of a NATO ally if assaulted by the Soviet Union. Kohl also announced that former East German territory would remain denuclearised and off-limits for the stationing of non-German NATO troops. What was striking was not the substance of these accords, some of which had been discussed in a general way in two plus four and other talks, but rather Kohl's quick, private conclusion of them with the Soviet leader. Claiming poor communications facilities, Kohl did not telephone Bush before he and Gorbachev made their dramatic announcements.⁹⁰

Two plus four and one plus three had been effectively reduced to one plus one, with Washington, Paris, and London watching from the sidelines. 'Not even a fig leaf is left' to conceal that West Germany had essentially negotiated on its own for reunification, a European diplomat observed.⁹¹ Informed of the deal, Baker, who had regarded the Caucasus meeting as 'a nonevent', 'was stunned'.⁹² Publicly, Bush

⁸⁸ Szabo, *German Unification*, 98.

⁸⁹ *Economist*, 21 July 1990, 47.

⁹⁰ Szabo, *German Unification*, 107.

⁹¹ Kaiser, *Deutschlands Vereinigung*, 246-50; for the quotation, *New York Times*, 17 July 1990.

⁹² Beschloss, Talbott, *Highest Levels*, 239.

praised the deal; 'privately he was piqued that in the end Kohl and Gorbachev had worked out the matter on their own', noted two close observers. 'Was this a glimmering of the new world to come?'⁹³

Almost unnoticed in the rush to unification was the fact that Bonn had ignored Baker's stipulation made on 12 December 1989 that the process should come about by means of self-determination. Although the surge of East German votes for the newly reconstituted Christian Democratic Party was in effect a vote for reunification, such a referendum was never formally held in the GDR – and West Germans never got the chance to vote on reunification. In sum, despite the initial confidence of Bush, Baker, Eagleburger, Zoellick, Seitz and others that the U.S. could adroitly 'manage' the changes in Europe, Germany proved to be – at least in the key matter of unification – the nation which had best 'managed' the others.

Unified Germany and the New World Order

Little more than two weeks after the meeting in the Caucasus, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, and the US shifted its attention to what became known as Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Meanwhile Germany, with unification assured, became even more the sought-after paymaster of the now harder-pressed superpowers. On 30 August, the day that Bush first uttered his rallying cry of a 'new world order', the President telephoned the Chancellor, detailing the multiplying costs of the campaign against Iraq and pressing for a large financial contribution. Bush and Baker repeated this appeal in the weeks that followed while Gorbachev, too, telephoned Kohl to ask for more money.⁹⁴ In subsequent months Bonn would pay out billions to help with the costs associated with sending allied troops to Saudi Arabia and the longer-term costs of sending Moscow's troops back to the Soviet Union.

Coming on top of the mounting burdens of rebuilding the former GDR, these financial subsidies would wrack Bonn's budget, but they also strengthened uniting Germany's leverage with the former victor powers. For example, in the last two plus four talks two issues remained: whether, as the Soviets argued, dual-capable weapons – those that could be armed with either nuclear or conventional explosives – should also be banned in the territory of the former GDR; and whether, as the Americans and British asserted, the prohibition on the stationing of US and other non-German troops in the former GDR did not forbid manoeuvres by such troops in the territory.⁹⁵ On both questions Kohl successfully resisted the Soviets and the Americans to the benefit of German sovereignty. The Final German Treaty provided that united Germany could deploy its dual-capable weapons in former GDR territory while it did not have to allow NATO manoeuvres there.⁹⁶

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 240. See also *New York Times*, 17 July 1990; *International Herald Tribune*, 17–19 July 1990; Smyser, 'Vienna, Versailles, and Now Paris', 61–70.

⁹⁴ Teltschik, 329 *Tage*, 354–62.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁹⁶ FRC, *Treaty*, 14. See article 5, part 3.

Almost exactly a year after the opening of the Berlin Wall, a CSCE summit met in Paris on 17–19 November 1990 to give international blessing to the unification of Germany, which had taken place on 3 October, to sign a treaty under which the NATO and Warsaw Pact nations would scrap thousands of conventional weapons, and to start building the new security structures of the CSCE.⁹⁷ This should have been a grand celebration, marking the formal end of the Second World War, the rebirth of self-determination in central and Eastern Europe and the conclusion of the Cold War. But the conclave proved disappointing for many, particularly the new democracies in central and Eastern Europe, who asked in vain for extensive economic and political support from the West. For Bush Administration officials, European problems now seemed significant only in so far as they affected the mounting military confrontation with Iraq over Kuwait. While Kohl asked Bush to settle the conflict with Iraq peacefully, Bush asked Kohl to contribute to the war effort.⁹⁸ When Bush did go to war with Iraq in January 1991, Britain injected new vigour into the special military relationship with America, France tried to mediate before joining the US, and Germany determinedly stayed out of the fighting while grudgingly giving money to the war effort. Meanwhile, the US and the EC, in this issue led by France, split in a bitter trade dispute over farm subsidies. Were such differences over trade and security a harbinger of serious acrimony in the transatlantic relations of the post-Cold War era?

Two superb, comprehensive studies of the diplomacy of German unification answer no to the above question. Elizabeth Pond in *Beyond the Wall* and Stephen F. Szabo in *The Diplomacy of German Unification*⁹⁹ both argue that the closeness between Washington and Bonn during what they see as the epochal unification process laid the basis for close co-operation in the future between the US and a German-led Europe. Although Szabo is more cognisant than Pond of specific US–German differences, he shares her view of the overall ‘seamless fit’ between the policies of Washington and Bonn.¹⁰⁰ These and similar accounts carry into the post-Cold War era the myth of an unambivalent US–German alliance. If, however, the diplomacy of unification was indeed a signifying event for the post-Cold War era, it is essential to discern the seams, or rather the fault lines, that appeared in 1989–90, and along which US–German and US–European positions may rub against each other in the future. One should keep in mind that officials in both Washington and Bonn, in their public statements and in their private interviews, had reason to emphasise US–German co-operation and US leadership in unification

⁹⁷ Gorbachev, many Eastern and central Europeans, and some Westerners, notably Genscher and Mitterrand, had all looked forward to building up the CSCE as an innovative alternative to the Cold War system. But the CSCE emerged from the summit an unimpressive edifice, with only a small secretariat in Prague, a conflict prevention centre in Vienna, a free elections commission in Warsaw, and a pledge by member foreign ministers to meet once a year with summits every two years. Despite Gorbachev’s enormous concessions in the former Soviet empire and his obvious troubles at home, his plea to be included in a common house of Europe went mostly unheeded. In large part, the unbuilding of the CSCE marked a victory for American and British policies, which had steadfastly opposed the construction of an institution that might compete with NATO.

⁹⁸ Hamilton, Clad, ‘Germany’, 39–49.

⁹⁹ See n. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Pond, *Beyond*, 185.

diplomacy. While Americans sought to answer critics who charged the Bush Administration with inaction and to reinforce their image of managerial expertise, Germans tried to rebut charges of aggressiveness and to retain their protective cover of being a loyal US ally. For over four decades, Americans and Germans found advantage in publicly emphasising their co-operation while shutting their distrust in the cupboard.

The celebratory reporting by most observers of the unification negotiations and the important collaboration between Washington and Bonn that occurred has obscured the coolness felt towards German unification by most American leaders in November–December 1989. Such apprehension stemmed from fear of instability, worry about Gorbachev's fate, mistrust of the Germans and concern for American leadership in NATO. Despite the confidence felt by most officials in the Bush Administration that they could manage the Germans and the unification talks, Kohl, at crucial moments, struck out on his own and presented Washington with *faits accomplis*, particularly with his speech on 28 November 1989 and his summit of 15–16 July 1990 with Gorbachev.

American officials accepted Kohl's independent actions because they did not want a public dispute and because they probably calculated that with a united Germany securely in NATO, such forays were manageable. The Bush Administration's self-congratulation on unification rested on rosy assumptions about the future: that future German governments would remain in NATO and want American troops, that the US would have the will and the resources to lead NATO, that Washington could use NATO as a tool for managing a variety of European issues, that Germany's security interests would continue to mesh with those of its neighbours and of the United States, that transatlantic trade tensions would not attenuate security ties and, perhaps most problematic, that Moscow's humiliating loss of East Germany and other parts of its empire would not spark a revanchist Russian nationalism.