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Gorbachev's Consent to Unified Germany's Membership in NATO

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GORBACHEV'S CONSENT TO UNIFIED GERMANY'S MEMBERSHIP IN NATO

The prospect of German reunification had been a topic of international discussion in the fall of 1989. But the opening of the Berlin wall on 9 November dispatched the discussion of reunification from a mere theoretical possibility to the single most important topic on the agenda of international politics. This, in turn, raised the question not only of the internal structure of the new Germany but also of its external status. Concerning the latter, the basic question was whether a unified Germany should be neutral or a member of NATO – or perhaps, as absurdly as that may seem in retrospect, a member of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

Apart from having to answer this question, decision makers in 1990 had to tackle a myriad of other problems German unification would pose. These concerned issues both of principle and legal status as well as process. Some of the most important of these can be summarized as follows:

- Should the unification of East and West Germany occur in accordance with article 23 of the constitution of the Federal Republic, that is, should or could West Germany's network of treaties, including the Final Act of 1954 that provided for the Federal Republic's membership in *NATO*, *automatically be extended to the eastern part* of the enlarged Germany? Or should the unification process be based on article 146, which necessitates convocation of a new constitutional assembly and the adoption of a new constitution by referendum?
- If unified Germany were to be neutralized, should it also be *demilitarized*? If so, who would enforce compliance?
- Irrespective of German neutrality or alliance membership, what should be the role of the *United States* in Europe, and what should be the size of its military presence – in the center and at its southern and northern flanks?
- Was it legitimate and, for both East and West Europeans, politically acceptable to proceed from the premise of *equivalency*? If, for instance, the Soviet Union were prepared to heed Eastern European demands and withdraw its forces from Eastern Europe, should the United States pull back its forces from Western Europe, too?
- Should *both alliances* be involved in the management of security issues on the European continent? But what about the Warsaw Pact? Should that organization be excluded, since historically it had been the major symbol and instrument of Soviet imperial domination and despite the fact, as it turned out, that it was doomed to oblivion?

- If the Warsaw Pact were to disintegrate, what should be the *status of its members other than East Germany*? Should they be allowed to join NATO, too, or would the Soviet political and military leaders consider this to be an unacceptable imposition, if not a provocation?
- If, on the other hand, the Warsaw Pact were to survive and be involved in the management of European security issues, how much *reform* would be required to make that organization palatable to the new non-communist countries of Eastern Europe and serve their national interests?
- Again assuming the continued existence of the Warsaw Pact, even if only for a transitional period, what overall *force levels and military equipment* should the two alliances have in Europe, and what should be the relationship between the Two Plus Four talks on the external aspects of German unification and the negotiations on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) in Vienna?
- What should be the total *strength of united Germany's armed forces*, and should their size be limited in a Two Plus Four or a CFE agreement?
- What should be the role of *nuclear weapons* in a new Europe, and what limits (if any) should be placed on their numbers and delivery vehicles, and their modernization? Should they be withdrawn from West Germany altogether?¹

Daunting as these questions were for any international forum to resolve, they almost paled in comparison with the problems they were likely to cause in the Soviet domestic political context. Ever since its inception, NATO had been portrayed by Soviet political leaders and propagandists as the incarnation of “U.S. imperialism” and West German “revanchism.” As late as December 1989, Gorbachev had called East Germany the Soviet Union's “strategic ally” and a reliable member of the Warsaw Pact to which no harm would come.² Now, a few months later, his increasingly unpopular leadership was being called upon not only to impute peaceful intentions to NATO and allocate to it a constructive security role in Europe but also to explain why it would be in the Soviet national interest to abandon the GDR.

Gorbachev and the Atlantic Alliance: Stage One

The evolution of Gorbachev's thinking took place in the context of the New Thinking. During the Cold War, NATO had provided the vital link between the United States and Europe, and the American military presence constituted the foremost guarantee of European security. Consequently, as Soviet foreign minister

¹ These issues are explored in more detail in Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev. An Analysis Based on New Archival Evidence, Memoirs, and Interviews* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998).

² Speech to the Central Committee of the CPSU after his return from the Soviet-American summit conference at Malta; *Pravda*, 9 December 1989.

Eduard Shevardnadze was to acknowledge in February 1990: “Until quite recently our aim was to oust the Americans from Europe at any price.”³ The advocates of the New Thinking, however, adopted the point of view that the effects of a withdrawal of the United States and thus the *de facto* dissolution of NATO would be “destabilizing.” A withdrawal of American forces would create insecurity among West European countries and enhance their military integration. This would run parallel to US defense efforts and to the detriment of the Soviet Union. It could also induce European states, acting individually or multilaterally, to produce and deploy nuclear weapons. The US presence had served as a restraint on West German nuclear ambitions. If the Americans were to leave, Bonn could demand its own nuclear weapons.

Such perceptions were endorsed by Gorbachev as early as 1986. In talks with West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, he said that he had no wish to undermine NATO: “We are of the opinion that, given the alliances that have taken shape, it is essential to strengthen those threads whose severance is fraught with the danger of a rupture of the world fabric.”⁴ To Henry Kissinger, in January 1989, he expressed the opinion that the Europeans needed the participation of the USSR and the USA in the “all-European process.” Stability in Europe was a “common interest.”⁵ Similarly, during his visit to Bonn, in June 1989, he told his German hosts that the Joint Soviet-German Declaration adopted on that occasion

does not demand that you, or we, should renounce our uniqueness or weaken our allegiance to the alliances. On the contrary, I am confident that maintaining [this allegiance] in our policies will serve to consolidate the contribution of each state to the creation of a peaceful European order as well as to shape a common European outlook.⁶

In Gorbachev's perceptions, the prospect of German unification enhanced rather than detracted from the importance of the two military alliances. “*Now is not the time to break up the established international political and economic institutions,*” he told visiting French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas shortly after the opening of the Berlin wall. “Let them be transformed, taking into account internal processes, let them find their place in the new situation and work together.”⁷ Similarly, in a briefing for the leaders of the Warsaw Pact on the Soviet-American summit meeting on Malta in December 1989, he stated that the two alliances “*will be preserved for the foreseeable future*” because they could make a “contribution to strengthening European security” by becoming a bridge between the two parts of Europe.⁸

³ E. Shevardnadze, “V mire vse meniaetsia s golovokruzhitel'noi bystrotoi,” *Izvestiia*, 19 February 1990.

⁴ *Soviet News* (London), No. 23 (July 1986).

⁵ As reported by *Pravda*, 19 January 1989.

⁶ “Vizit M. S. Gorbacheva v FRG. Rech' M. S. Gorbacheva,” *Pravda*, 13 June 1989.

⁷ Bill Keller, “Gorbachev Urges West to Show Restraint on Turmoil in Eastern Europe,” *New York Times*, 15 November 1989 (italics mine).

⁸ *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, 5 December 1989 (italics mine).

It could be argued that the fact that Gorbachev publicly allocated a positive role to the Atlantic alliance in European security affairs – a step unprecedented for a Soviet leader – predetermined Soviet consent to membership of a unified Germany in NATO. This, however, was not the case. A first major opportunity to set in stone the Soviet position on security matters presented itself in the 26 January *ad hoc* meeting of a small circle of top decision makers in his Central Committee office. Gorbachev failed to use this opportunity.

A second opportunity presented itself during chancellor Helmut Kohl's visit to Moscow on 10-11 February. The meeting produced a sensation. Gorbachev told Kohl:

I believe that there is no divergence of opinion between the Soviet Union, the Federal Republic, and the GDR about unity and the right of the people to strive for unity and to decide on the further development. There is agreement between you and me that *the Germans themselves have to make their choice. The Germans in the Federal Republic and in the GDR themselves have to know what road they want to take.*⁹

But this left open the question as to whether article 23 or article 146 was to govern the unification process.

A third occasion was the visit by East German prime minister Modrow to Moscow on 30 January. Again the matter was left surrounded by vagueness and indecision. The East German prime minister certainly was committed to German neutrality. This was evident in his four-stage plan from confederation to German unity, which posited “military neutrality of the GDR and the FRG on the road to federation.”¹⁰ Modrow confirmed his commitment to this goal at a press conference in East Berlin shortly after his return from Moscow. German unification, he said, was intimately connected with the idea of building a Common European Home. In constructing that new home, he continued, one

has to proceed from the idea that already in the stage of confederation, both German states will *step by step detach themselves from their obligations of alliance* toward third countries and attain a state of *military neutrality*.¹¹

PDS chief Gregor Gysi carried the neutrality ball several yards farther downfield. In accordance with the proceedings at the *ad hoc* meeting, he had been invited to Moscow and on 2 February held talks with Gorbachev, Alexander Yakovlev, and Valentin Falin. In a subsequent interview, Gysi reported that he and Gorbachev had been of one mind on the point that, at the end of any reunification process,

⁹ Kohl, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit*, p. 272 (italics mine).

¹⁰ Text as published in Modrow, *Aufbruch und Ende*, appendix 6, pp. 186-88.

¹¹ “Hans Modrow unterbreitet Konzept ‘Für Deutschland, einig Vaterland,’” *Neues Deutschland*, 2 February 1990 (italics mine).

Germany not only had to be neutral but *demilitarized*.¹² The TASS report on the Gysi-Gorbachev meeting, however, did not contain this requirement. It only recorded that Gorbachev had struck a balance between support for the GDR as a sovereign state and recognition of the momentum towards German unity.¹³ The Soviet leadership, it would appear, was intent on keeping its options open.

The ambiguities persisted in Baker's meetings with Shevardnadze and Gorbachev on 8-9 February. The Soviet foreign minister did not push the idea of neutralization, telling his American counterpart only that Moscow had once supported the idea of a unified Germany, but of a neutral unified country, and that a united Germany could not be adapted to the alliances as they now existed. In the same way as he had previously worried about the possible rise of right-wing and neo-Nazi forces, he was now anxious about the danger of a militarized Germany.¹⁴ Gorbachev was less concerned about such dangers than his foreign minister. Nevertheless, he saw advantages to having American troops in Germany (and Europe) based on the following consideration: "We don't really want to see a replay of Versailles, where the Germans were able to arm themselves. ... The best way to constrain that process is to ensure that Germany is contained within European structures."¹⁵

Earlier in the conversation, Baker had given assurances to Gorbachev that were to play an important role several years later in the vehement Russian opposition to any further eastward expansion of NATO – to include former members of the Warsaw Pact and even former Soviet republics like the Baltic States. If Germany were to remain part of NATO, Baker said, "*there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east.*"¹⁶ Baker then asked Gorbachev directly whether he would rather see an independent Germany outside of NATO and with no US forces on German soil, or a united Germany tied to NATO but with assurances "that there would be no extension of NATO's current jurisdiction eastward." Gorbachev replied that he was still giving thought to these options. "Soon we are going to have a seminar [a discussion] among our political leadership to talk about all of these options." One thing was clear, however: "*Any extension of the zone of NATO is unacceptable.*" "I agree," Baker replied.¹⁷ The ambiguities in the Western position were compounded by Baker's remarks at a press conference after his talks with the Soviet leaders to the effect that the United States favored a unified Germany's "continued membership in, or association with, NATO."¹⁸

To review the state of affairs in mid-February 1990, both the Western and the Soviet position on Germany's future security status were only beginning to take shape. Ambiguity surrounded both positions. The Western preference for a unified

¹² Gysi interview with *Washington Post*, 4 February 1990; see also the report in the PDS newspaper, "Nicht nur Neutralität, sondern Demilitarisierung," *Neues Deutschland*, 5 February 1990.

¹³ "Beseda v TsK KPSS," *Pravda*, 5 February 1990.

¹⁴ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, p. 180. In his memoirs, Baker fails to report Shevardnadze's views on the issues of German neutralization and demilitarization; *The Politics of Diplomacy*, pp. 202-5.

¹⁵ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, p. 184.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 182 (italics mine).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183. Jack Matlock, who was present at the meeting and took his own notes, has confirmed the accuracy of this crucial exchange. Interview with this author on 10 February 1997 in Cambridge, Mass.

¹⁸ Thomas L. Friedman, "Gorbachev Accepts Deep Cuts in Europe," *New York Times*, 10 February 1990 (italics mine).

Germany's alliance membership was muddled by the discussion of whether the whole of Germany should be a member of the Atlantic alliance politically but remain outside its military organization (that is, have a status similar to that of France); of what "association" with the Atlantic alliance could be all about; and by what was meant by ruling out any extension of NATO's "jurisdiction."

Gorbachev was torn more fundamentally between various positions. He recognized the dangers of Versailles but did not seem to be averse to a neutralized and perhaps even demilitarized Germany. He allocated important security functions to the Atlantic alliance and American forces in Europe but he opposed the logical extension of this framework to include unified Germany's membership in NATO. He agreed with Kohl to let the Germans decide the form and speed of unification but left open the question of whether this also applied to its external aspects, including the right of the Germans to decide to which alliance, if any, they wanted to belong.

However, in late February, all the ambiguities and with it any flexibility in negotiations seemed to dissipate, and on *both* sides. In what amounted to a reversal of the *American* position, at a meeting at Camp David on 24 February, Bush and Kohl agreed that

a unified Germany should remain a *full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, including participation in its military structure*. We agreed that US military forces should remain stationed in the united Germany and elsewhere in Europe as a continuing guarantor of stability. The Chancellor and I are also in agreement that in a unified state, the former territory of the GDR should have a special military status [that] would take into account the legitimate security interests of all interested countries, including those of the Soviet Union.¹⁹

This position remained firm throughout all the subsequent negotiations with Moscow.

Soviet Retrenchment

The turn to a more uncompromising *Soviet* stance had been foreshadowed even a few days earlier. In what can be regarded as having been related to the upcoming Two Plus Four negotiations, Gorbachev warned that Moscow would resist Western efforts to dictate the proceedings: "We rule out such a method," he said in an interview with *Pravda* published on 21 February, "whereby three or four [countries] first come to an arrangement between themselves and then set out their already agreed-upon position before the participants. This is unacceptable."²⁰ On the form which an agreement should take, he thought that there should be a peace treaty. On substance, the treaty should provide for a *role for both NATO and the Warsaw Pact*, and

¹⁹ Joint Bush-Kohl press conference; excerpts as quoted by Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, p. 216.

²⁰ "Otvety M.S. Gorbacheva na voprosy korrespondenta 'Pravdy,'" *Pravda*, 21 February 1990.

he called any change in the military-strategic balance between the two alliances “impermissible.”²¹

New and more intransigent inflections on the German security issue also surfaced in the foreign ministry. Shevardnadze formed a working group to deal with the German problem and the Two Plus Four negotiations, and on 24 February assembled the MFA's Collegium, including his deputies and fourteen other officials, ostensibly to drive firm stakes into the international negotiation ground. The Collegium derided the “prescriptions advanced in some Western countries” and specifically the idea that NATO membership of a unified Germany in NATO would be in the Soviet interest. It was unacceptable that anyone but the Soviet leaders and people themselves herself should seek to determine what constituted the essence of Soviet security and how best to safeguard it. The USSR had its own notions as to how to do this and “certainly, any variants envisaging the membership of unified Germany in NATO do not correspond to these notions.”²²

Gorbachev now also retracted his position that unification was the prerogative of the Germans themselves. He objected to a procedure whereby “the Germans agree among themselves and then propose to the others only to endorse the decisions already adopted by them.”²³ Similarly, on 6 March, at the second and last of Modrow's visits to Moscow, he even eschewed the terms “German unity” and “unification,” asserting instead that it was “by no means a matter of indifference how the *rapprochement* (*sblizhenie*) of the two German states takes place.” He also warned that the “fanning of speculation, the tendency to annex the GDR, and the policy of creating *faits accomplis* do not correspond to a responsible approach to a solution of a problem as sensitive to the fate of Europe and the world as the German question.”²⁴ In other words, article 23 of the Federal Republic's constitution as the point of departure for unification was definitely out of the question.

This apparently firm stance, however, as so many others previously, was severely undercut by the course of events. The parliamentary elections in East Germany on 18 March produced a stunning victory for the conservative parties, which polled 48 percent of the vote. The SPD, which had been regarded as the front-runner, received only 22 percent, and the PDS 16 percent. The most disastrous performance was that of the Alliance 90, the umbrella party for groups like the Neue Forum that had been in the forefront of the democratic revolution of the preceding year; it garnered less than three percent of the vote. No reform socialism in the GDR, then, but clarity that the new government under Prime Minister Lothar de Maizière (CDU) would not support anything but Kohl's preference for unification under article 23.

This did not deter the Politburo from reiterating what had now become an untenable position. The reiteration came in the form of PB “instructions” (*direktivny*)

²¹ Ibid.

²² “V MID SSSR. Rassmotren shirokii krug voprosov,” *Pravda*, 26 February 1990.

²³ Interview in *Pravda*, 21 February 1990.

²⁴ “Vstrecha M.S. Gorbacheva s pravitel'svennoi delegatsii GDR,” *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, 7 March 1990. Gorbachev's emphasis on *sblizhenie* had been apparent earlier, in his telephone conversation with Modrow on 12 February, “Zapis' osnovnogo soderzhaniia telefonnogo razgovora M.S. Gorbacheva s Predsedatelem Soveta Ministrov GDR Kh. Modrovom, 12 fevralia 1990 goda,” Hoover Institution Archives, Box 3, Zelikow-Rice Project on German Unification.

for Shevardnadze for his talks with Bush and Baker in Washington on 4-6 April. They were issued on 2 April approved a draft that had been prepared a few days earlier and sponsored by Shevardnadze, Defense Minister Yazov, KGB chief Kryuchkov, PB foreign policy *kurator* Yakovlev, CC secretary for the military industry Baklanov, and Deputy Prime Minister Belousov.²⁵ Shevardnadze was instructed to emphasize to Bush and Baker

the necessity of ensuring the stage-by-stage unification of the two German states and its synchronization with the all-European process. It is important to prevent the movement toward unity from acquiring uncontrolled forms and speed which would put the Four Powers, Germany's neighbors, and Europe as a whole in a position of [having to] face accomplished facts and seriously hamper the search for mutually acceptable decisions on the external aspects of the building of German unity. The unification process should take place not in the form of an *Anschluß* of the GDR but should be the result of agreements between the two German states as equal subjects of international law. We should emphasize that, naturally, we favor the existence of the GDR as an independent state for as long as possible.

Concerning the external aspects of unification, Gorbachev now dispelled Western hopes to the effect that his and Shevardnadze's failure to demand a neutral status for unified Germany had presaged Soviet consent to NATO membership. In reference to the talks between Gorbachev and Modrow, TASS reported that

It was stated with full determination [at the talks] that the inclusion of a future Germany in NATO is inadmissible and will not take place, whatever arguments may be used. One cannot allow the breakdown of the balance [of power] in Europe, the basis of stability and security, and of mutual trust and cooperation.²⁶

On the face of it, this settled the question: unified Germany's membership in NATO was unacceptable. Other solutions had to be found.

The Politburo directives confirmed this position.

We should emphasize that the most appropriate form of a German settlement would be a peace treaty that would draw the line under the past war and determine the military-political status of Germany. It should have as its necessary elements the partial demilitarization and the establishment of a reasonable sufficiency (*razumnaia dostatochnost'*) for the

²⁵ "Vypuska iz protokola No. 184 zasedaniia Politburo TsK KPSS ot 2 apreliia 1990 goda. O direktivakh dlia peregovorov Ministra inostrannykh del SSSR s Prezidentom SShA Dzh. Bushem i Gosudarstvennym sekretarem Dzh. Beikerom (Vashington, 4-6 apreliia 1990 goda)." The document is stored in the Russian TsKhSD archives; a copy is available in the archives of the Hoover Institution.

²⁶ "Vstrecha M.S. Gorbacheva s pravitel'stvennoi delegatsii GDR," *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, 7 March 1990.

armed forces. ... If Baker were to react negatively to the idea of a peace treaty, we should inquire about his vision of the forms for a peace settlement with Germany.

Until the creation of new European security structures, the directives continued, the rights and responsibilities of the Four should be preserved to the full extent. Furthermore, "We should firmly state our negative attitude to the participation of the new Germany in NATO. *Germany could become a non-aligned state, preserving [only] its EC membership.*"²⁷

At the beginning of May, in what Gorbachev's foreign policy advisor Anatoly Chernyaev called a "rough" (*zhestkii*) meeting, the Politburo discussed the German a second and last time.²⁸ Shevardnadze, assisted by his advisor Tarasenko, had prepared a position paper which, following by then well established practice, was redrafted and turned in a more uncompromising direction by the Third Department of the foreign ministry. The paper was to serve as a point of reference for his upcoming participation in the first round of the Two Plus Four negotiations in Bonn. It was co-sponsored by Yakovlev, Yazov, and Kryuchkov but was apparently still not tough enough to satisfy the more conservative PB members, including prominent and influential PB member Ligachev, who severely criticized it. Furthermore, with the exception of Shevardnadze, the sponsors of the new directives remained silent. Gorbachev sided with the conservative majority faction. He burst out heatedly at one point, stating categorically: "*We will not let Germany into NATO, and that is the end of it. I will even risk the collapse of the [CFE] negotiations in Vienna and START but will not allow this.*"²⁹

Chernyaev, who had not been asked for his opinion at the PB meeting, sent a note to Gorbachev on the following day, reflecting both on the decision-making process in the Politburo and the Soviet negotiating position on the German problem. He deplored the fact that, although many PB members lacked any expertise on that problem, they were nevertheless allowed to discuss it. As a result, positions were formed under the influence of Ligachev and his dire warnings about NATO approaching the borders of the Soviet Union. Such warnings, he told Gorbachev, were nonsense. They reflected 1945 thinking and pseudo-patriotism of the masses. "Germany will remain in NATO in any case," he predicted, "and we will again try to catch up with a train that has left the station. Instead of putting forward specific and firm terms for our consent, we are heading toward a failure."³⁰ To Chernyaev, at least, the consequences of the Soviet failure to present terms in accordance with Soviet interests and acceptable to the West were immediately obvious. The telegrams which Shevardnadze sent from Bonn and his report on the Two Plus Four meeting after his return to Moscow indicated that he had been forced to evade the

²⁷ Ibid. (italics mine).

²⁸ Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, p. 347. The record of the meeting has not been made available.

²⁹ Ibid. (italics mine).

³⁰ Ibid., p. 348.

issues by taking recourse to “general phraseology” and complaining that “we lost” another round in the diplomatic game.³¹

Notwithstanding his seemingly inalienable negative stance, within just a few weeks after his outburst, Gorbachev *did* consent to a unified Germany in NATO. What had happened?

The Consent to NATO Membership

When Chernyaev was asked, when it was that Gorbachev changed his mind, he unhesitatingly replied: “At the Soviet-American summit.” When the supplementary question was put to him, what had induced him to do so, the answer was equally short and precise: “Baker's nine points.”³²

From 16 to 19 May, Baker had again visited Moscow and talked to Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, with the German problem as the main focus of the discussions. The secretary of state presented a comprehensive package of incentives designed to persuade Gorbachev to accept the basic foundation of all subsequent and supplementary measures for a German settlement. As Baker has explained in his memoirs, the nine points had been advanced individually, “but by wrapping them up in a package and calling them ‘nine assurances,’ we greatly enhanced their political effect.”³³ The nine points were as follows:

1. Limitation of the size of armed forces in Europe, including in Central Europe, in a CFE agreement, with further reductions to be provided for in CFE follow-on negotiations.
2. The beginning of arms control negotiations on short-range nuclear missiles to be moved up.
3. Reaffirmation by Germany that it would neither possess nor produce nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons.
4. No NATO forces to be stationed on the former territory of the GDR during a specified transition period.
5. An appropriate transition period to be agreed upon for the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from German territory.
6. A comprehensive review of NATO strategy and change of NATO's conventional and nuclear force posture.
7. Settlement of Germany's future borders, that is, essentially confirmation of the Polish-German frontier.
8. Enhancement of the functions of the CSCE to ensure a significant role for the Soviet Union in Europe and linkage of a summit meeting of that organization with the finalization of a CFE treaty, both to take place at the end of 1990.
9. Development of Germany's economic ties with the Soviet Union, including fulfillment of the GDR's economic obligations to the USSR.³⁴

³¹ Ibid.

³² Interview of the author with Chernyaev on 25 June 1993.

³³ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 251n.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 250-51; Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, pp. 263-64; and interview of the author with former U.S. National Security Council staff member Robert Zoellick, who had prepared the Nine Points. The

Gorbachev took copious notes of Baker's presentation. But his reaction was contradictory. He approved much of what the secretary of state had said but adhered to the principle that it was impossible for the Soviet Union to accept a unified Germany in NATO. This would constitute a fundamental shift in the strategic balance of forces and “spell the end of perestroika.” Although he knew that Germany would be closer to the United States, it still should not be in the Western alliance. If that was unacceptable to the United States, then perhaps the Soviet Union should be admitted to NATO.³⁵ His ambiguous and conceptually incoherent position was reflected also in his reply to Baker's question as to whether, by insisting that Germany remain outside NATO, he was talking about a *neutral* Germany. “I don't know if I'd call it that,” Gorbachev said. “Maybe I'd call it nonaligned.”³⁶

In the subsequent weeks, at and at the sidelines of the Two Plus Four negotiating table, Soviet representatives vacillated between various ideas such as (1) the settlement of the German problem by a peace treaty; (2) synchronization of the unification process with the creation of new security structures in conjunction with the transformation of the military alliances and new machinery to be allocated to the CSCE; (3) retention of the special status of Berlin and the presence of the armed forces of the Four Powers in Germany until after the conclusion of a peace treaty; (4) membership of both unified Germany and the Soviet Union in NATO; and (5) dual membership of Germany in both alliances. Everything on that menu, as Shevardnadze knew well from his talks, was abhorrent to the taste of the two conservative-ruled Germanys and their NATO allies, notably the United States. Nevertheless, the various indigestible dishes of that menu continued to be served in the proceedings and position papers at closed internal meetings and advertised in public statements.

The breakthrough in the controversy about Germany's security status occurred at the Soviet-American summit in Washington, 30 May-3 June.³⁷ On 31 May, in response to President Bush's review of the assurances, Gorbachev initially reiterated the intransigent Soviet position (letting a united Germany join only NATO would “unbalance” Europe), and he repeated the alternatives he preferred: Germany should either be a member of both alliances or not belong to any alliance. Shevardnadze supported the dual membership idea and Gorbachev added that perhaps *any* country could join either alliance, musing (again) whether the Soviet Union should apply for NATO membership. The American president then introduced an argument that other US and West German officials had begun to employ at lower levels. Under the CSCE's principles in the Helsinki Final Act, all nations had the right to choose their own alliances. Should Germany, too, not have the right to decide for

interview took place at a conference of the Freie Universität Berlin on 5 July 1994, attended by the Political Directors of the Two Plus Four negotiations.

³⁵ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, p. 265.

³⁶ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 251.

³⁷ The account of the proceedings at the Soviet-American summit follows Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, pp. 276-81. An earlier, less detailed but essentially congruent, account of the meeting can be found in Beschloss and Talbot, *At the Highest Levels*, pp. 215-30.

itself which alliance it would want to join? Gorbachev nodded and agreed in a matter-of-fact way that she did.³⁸

This constituted a *de facto* consent to unified Germany's membership in NATO and came completely unexpected. But from the American viewpoint, it was important to ascertain whether Gorbachev's change of position was merely a *lapsus linguae* and temporary aberration or a radical change of position. If the latter, it was important to induce Gorbachev to commit himself publicly to it. Prompted by a note from one of the participants, Bush said: "I am gratified that you and I seem to agree that nations can choose their own alliances." Gorbachev confirmed this by saying: "So we will put it this way. The United States and the Soviet Union are in favor of Germany deciding herself [after a Two Plus Four settlement] in which alliance she would like to participate."³⁹ As for a public commitment to the change of position, the NSC staff prepared a statement for the president to be delivered on 3 June, at the end of the summit conference. It submitted the draft statement to Soviet ambassador Alexander Bessmertnykh for his review and approval by Gorbachev. There were no objections. The statement read:

On the matter of Germany's external alliances, I believe, as do Chancellor Kohl and members of the Alliance, that the united Germany should be a full member of NATO. President Gorbachev, frankly, does not hold that view. But we are in full agreement that the matter of alliance membership is, in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act, a matter for the Germans to decide.⁴⁰

The surprise among the Soviet participants was equally great. There had been no prior consultation or coordination. Gorbachev had acted unilaterally and spontaneously. Even Chernyaev had not been alerted to the impending change of his chief's position.⁴¹ In the meeting room, they almost physically distanced themselves from Gorbachev's remarks. Akhromeev and Falin could be observed uncomfortably shifting in their seats.⁴² Gorbachev slipped a piece of paper to the latter, asking him to explain the legal, political, and military rationales that allegedly made a pro-Atlantic solution unacceptable.⁴³ While Falin launched into his presentation, Gorbachev conferred with Shevardnadze. When Gorbachev reentered the discussion, he proposed that Shevardnadze work with Baker on the German issue. Oddly, the Soviet foreign minister at first refused, right in front of the Americans, saying that the matter had to be decided by the heads of government.⁴⁴

³⁸ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, p. 277. Participants in the meeting on the Soviet side included Shevardnadze, Chernyaev, Akhromeev, Falin, Dobrynin, and Alexander Bessmertnykh, the Soviet ambassador in Washington.

³⁹ There is an important discrepancy in the rendering of the conversation between the American account, as reconstructed by Zelikow and Rice, and the Soviet version, as contained in Gorbachev's and Chernyaev's memoirs. According to the latter account, "the Soviet Union" was omitted in Gorbachev's reply (Gorbachev, *Zhizn'*, Vol. 2, p. 175; Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, p. 348).

⁴⁰ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, p. 281.

⁴¹ Interview of the author with Chernyaev on 25 June 1993.

⁴² Zoellick, personal communication to the author (see above, n. 440); Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, p. 253; and Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, pp. 277-78.

⁴³ Falin, *Politische Erinnerungen*, p. 493.

⁴⁴ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, p. 278.

Yet, it would seem, at this stage Gorbachev's change of position was neither unconditional nor irreversible. For him, vaguely and incongruously, there still existed different options, one of which would somehow make it possible to avoid Germany's full membership in NATO.⁴⁵ Such ambiguities were reflected in his public stance. On 12 June, in his report on the Soviet-American summit to the Supreme Soviet, Gorbachev said that he had "told the [American] president that I think that the American presence in Europe, since it fulfills a certain role in maintaining stability, is an element of the strategic situation and does not represent a problem for us." He also outlined a solution, according to which "the Bundeswehr would, as before, be subordinate to NATO, and the East German troops would be *subordinate to the new Germany*," which obviously meant that they would no longer be subordinate to the Warsaw Pact.⁴⁶ However, this applied only to a "transition period." What, if anything, would happen thereafter was left open.

The murky security waters were muddied further by the ideas, all mentioned in his report, of "associate membership" of the GDR in the Warsaw Pact, a unified Germany having to "honor all obligations" inherited from the two Germanys, and by his return to the "dual membership" proposal.⁴⁷ Only one thing was crystal clear: there was a complete and deliberate lack of clarity in the Soviet stance, except for the fact that the notion of a unified Germany in NATO as being absolutely unacceptable was no longer valid.

This also applied to Shevardnadze's position. His initial recalcitrance at the Soviet-American summit to work with Baker on details of a security arrangement that would – in accordance with Gorbachev's spontaneous consent – proceed from the premise of unified Germany's membership in NATO did not mean that the foreign minister objected to the principle of the revised Soviet stance. In the internal management of the issue, however, it was sensible for him to let *Gorbachev* take responsibility rather than leading or leaving the conservative opposition to believe that yet another fundamental change in international security policy had unilaterally been decided by the foreign minister.

In the (deliberately created?) atmosphere of ambiguity the stage for the formal consent was finally set. By mid-July, in a plethora of private talks and the Two Plus Four meetings at the foreign ministers' level, clarification was achieved as to the form that NATO's first eastward expansion could take:

- Non-integrated German units could be stationed in the former GDR immediately after Germany regained full sovereignty, and German NATO-integrated forces after the withdrawal of Soviet troops, but no allied forces.
- Germany would not produce or possess nuclear, bacteriological or chemical weapons.
- NATO would transform its structure and its role in Europe, emphasize its political role.

⁴⁵ Interview with Chernyaev on 25 June 1993.

⁴⁶ "Vystuplenie M.S. Gorbacheva na tret'ei sessii Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR," *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, 13 June 1990.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* (italics mine).

- Germany would strive for a rearrangement of German-Soviet political and economic relations in a comprehensive bilateral treaty and accept the Polish-German borders as final.

Favorable conditions were also created by the commitment of the G7 to assist the Soviet Union financially; Lithuania's suspension of its declaration of independence; and the emasculation of the conservative opposition of Soviet party and foreign ministry officials as well as military officers who had either been outmaneuvered or isolated themselves, as both the Russian and Soviet party congresses had demonstrated.

The formal consent to unified Germany's membership in NATO occurred during Chancellor Kohl visit to the Soviet Union from 14 to 16 July. On 11 July, in a letter to Kohl, Gorbachev had confirmed his invitation to the German chancellor to visit the Soviet Union, including the suggestion for a side-trip to Stavropol, the town and krai where he had grown up and begun his career, and the small North Caucasian mountain resort of Arkhyz, about 100 miles south of the city. The suggestion was obviously meant to provide a personal touch to the visit and set the stage for a repetition of the informal conversations which the two leaders had had in June 1989 along the banks of the Rhine, and it augured well for what the German participants could expect from the talks.⁴⁸ According to the accounts provided by Chernyaev and Kohl's foreign policy advisor, Horst Teltschik, the breakthrough on the main issues took place on 15 July in Moscow, in the guest house of the Soviet foreign ministry on Tolstoy street. The private conversations between Kohl and Gorbachev were witnessed only by the two aides and interpreters.⁴⁹

The two leaders exchanged papers containing their mutual ideas concerning the provisions to be contained in a treaty on partnership and cooperation between the Soviet Union and Germany. In the talks, Gorbachev acknowledged that Germany should regain full sovereignty. On the central issue of NATO, Gorbachev said that membership of unified Germany in that alliance constituted the most important problem. *De jure* the question was unambiguous. *De facto* matters were more complicated. NATO authority could not immediately be extended to the former territory of the GDR. A transitional period was necessary. Kohl and Teltschik, like Bush and his advisers six weeks earlier, were stunned, but the German chancellor outwardly reacted calmly and was eager to make sure that there had been no misunderstanding. Pressed by him, Gorbachev clarified that *Germany could remain in NATO*, but NATO had to take into consideration that its authority could not be extended to the territory of the former GDR for a transitional period, that is, for as long as Soviet troops continued to be stationed there. He reinforced this historic concession by a second commitment. The final settlement in the Two Plus Four framework should provide for the *immediate* abolition of Four Power rights. A

⁴⁸ This was recognized by Teltschik, *329 Tage*, p. 310; for the informal conversations between Kohl and Gorbachev on the banks along the Rhine, see above, p. 396. Gorbachev's commitment to hold talks in the second half of July and to include the Caucasus as their venue had occurred on 14 May, when Teltschik had been on a secret mission to Moscow.

⁴⁹ The subsequent account of the 15 July talks is based on Teltschik, *329 Tage*, pp. 319-24; Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, pp. 358-59; and Kohl, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit*, pp. 421-44.

separate treaty should govern the status of the Soviet armed forces on the territory of the former GDR.

Gorbachev's and Kohl's views, however, still appeared to differ on what was meant by *de jure* and *de facto* NATO membership. What Gorbachev seemed to have in mind, according to Kohl, was to limit NATO for all practical purposes to the western part of Germany, and that any change of that restriction could be agreed upon only later, after the successful conclusion of the negotiations on the withdrawal of Soviet forces. Contrary to his host's assurances, as Kohl has commented, the Federal Republic would not have regained sovereignty after all. The later negotiations on the withdrawal of forces would have provided Moscow with a lever with which to exert pressure on Bonn to accede to Soviet demands on the alliance problem.⁵⁰ Apparently sensing the disappointment of his guest, Kohl continues, Gorbachev said reassuringly: "We have [only] begun our talks here in Moscow and will continue them in the Caucasus mountains. In the mountain air, things will be seen much more clearly."⁵¹ Teltschik did not share Kohl's skepticism. For Chernyaev, too, the matter was settled. In his view, his chief had no longer suggested any "diluted versions" on Germany's full membership in NATO.⁵²

On 16 July in Arkhyz, after having "argued back and forth," as Kohl writes, with Gorbachev "yielding step by step to our tenacious urging," that the Soviet president relented and agreed that German troops, as part of NATO's integrated command structure, could be stationed on the territory of the former GDR.⁵³ The final agreement reached at the talks was announced at the neighboring spa of Zheleznovodsk. It consisted of the following eight points:

1. A unified Germany shall comprise the Federal Republic, the GDR, and Berlin.
2. The rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers will end after the achievement of German unification, and unified Germany will enjoy full and unrestricted sovereignty.
3. The unified Germany, exercising its unrestricted sovereignty and in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act, may decide freely and by itself which alliance it wants to belong to.
4. The unified Germany and the Soviet Union will conclude a bilateral treaty providing for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the GDR within three to four years. Another treaty will cover the consequences of the introduction of the Deutschmark in the GDR for this transitional period.
5. For as long as Soviet troops remain stationed on the territory of the former GDR, NATO structures will not be extended to this part of Germany. The immediate

⁵⁰ Kohl, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit*, p. 425.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

⁵² Chernyaev, *Shest' let s Gorbachevym*, p. 359.

⁵³ Kohl, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit*, p. 435. Genscher appears to concur with the interpretation that this issue was settled only in Arkhyz; Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 839-40.

applicability of articles 5 and 6 of the NATO treaty will remain in effect. Non-integrated units of the Bundeswehr – that is, units of the Territorial Defense – may be stationed immediately after unification on the territory of the GDR and Berlin.

6. Troops of the three Western powers shall remain in Berlin for the duration of the presence of Soviet troops on former GDR territory. The Federal government will seek to conclude corresponding agreements with the three Western governments.
7. The Federal government is willing to make a binding declaration in the current CFE talks in Vienna to reduce the level of the armed forces of a unified Germany to a personnel strength of 370,000 within a period of three to four years.
8. A unified Germany will refrain from producing, storing, or controlling nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and continue to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.⁵⁴

Why the Consent?

Gorbachev, in Chernyaev's view (as quoted), had changed his mind at the Soviet-American summit at the end of May, and one of the reasons why had been Baker's nine points. He also mentioned two more substantial reasons: First, Gorbachev was impressed by the reasoning that a neutral Germany could, and one day might, seek access to nuclear weapons. Second: "The West had the better arguments."⁵⁵ Be that as it may, there is at least one major contributory factor that needs to be added: In the spring of 1990 the Soviet Union was running out of options. Again, two reasons were responsible. First, the idea of a neutralization of Germany had failed to attract support not only in Western Europe and in the United States but also in Eastern Europe. Second, notions such as "associate membership" of the eastern part of Germany in the Warsaw Pact or "dual membership" of unified Germany in both alliances were rendered obsolete by the rapid disintegration of the eastern alliance.

Concerning the issue of neutralization, matters were fairly simple. At the February 1990 Open Skies foreign ministers' meeting of NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Ottawa, only two foreign ministers were calling for the neutralization of Germany: Shevardnadze and East Germany's Oskar Fischer. This line-up was repeated at the mid-March Warsaw Pact foreign ministers' conference in Prague. Czechoslovak foreign minister Jiri Dienstbier said that neutrality would be "the worst alternative."⁵⁶ The Polish foreign minister, Krystof Skubiszewski, too, stated that a neutral Germany would "not be good for Europe"; it would "foster some

⁵⁴ This enumeration is derived from Kohl's statement at the 16 July press conference in Zheleznovodsk, as carried by the German news agencies and TASS; see "Press-konferentsiia M.S. Gorbacheva i G. Kolia," *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, 18 July 1990, and "Excerpts from Kohl-Gorbachev News Conference," *New York Times*, 17 July 1990. The announcement was structured in seven points; point five and six, as presented here, were merged in Kohl's statement.

⁵⁵ Interview with Chernyaev on 25 June 1993 in Moscow.

⁵⁶ Celestine Bohlen, "Warsaw Alliance Split on Germany," *New York Times*, 18 March 1990.

tendencies in Germany to be a great power acting on its own.”⁵⁷ And when the East German foreign minister was replaced a few weeks later as a result of the free elections in the GDR, this left the Soviet Union as the only country in Europe even (more or less) seriously discussing the matter.

As for the *Warsaw Pact*, as late as 12 June Gorbachev – reporting to the Supreme Soviet on the results of the Soviet-American summit in Washington – stated that the rival blocs would continue to exist “for longer than might be imagined.”⁵⁸ Was there a direct connection between Gorbachev’s consent to membership of united Germany in NATO and the continued existence of the Warsaw Pact? In all likelihood there was, and the reason why may lie in the willingness of the Soviet political and, *nolens volens*, the military to convert the Warsaw Pact from an instrument of Soviet domination and control to a *political* institution respecting the sovereignty of its member nations. Only in the medium to long term, they thought, would the alliances be dissolved in favor of a new European security structure. A transformation of the Warsaw Pact, they hoped, would be feasible even after the systemic changes in Eastern Europe because the “state interests” of the member countries of the Pact would remain essentially unchanged. Marshal Akhromeev, in November 1989, had expressed this idea as follows:

First of all, there's the stability of the territory and state boundaries. Second, there are the economic interests of the states. After all, they've been linked for many decades. That is why the military-political alliance remains. The *state interests of both alliances still remain*, and the contradictions remain. And a certain quantity of arms and armed forces will remain. But what matters is that it be such a quantity which would not permit the country to start a war, even if it wanted to.⁵⁹

The hope that after injection of a reformist antidote the moribund Warsaw Pact would survive and return to the life of European politics was encouraged by attitudes in Poland in February 1990. For a brief time interval, reflecting anxiety about the reconstitution of a potentially powerful Germany at its western borders, Poland remained committed to cooperation with the Soviet Union in a reformed Pact. Polish prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki made this clear when he said that, indeed, there had been changes of system and ideology. But this did “not mean that at the state level we do not see the importance of this alliance for the problem of security for our borders.” He even argued that Soviet troops should remain in Poland because of “the German problem.”⁶⁰

The Soviet reform concept was presented to the Pact members at the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee (PCC), essentially a Warsaw Pact summit

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Vystuplenie M.S. Gorbacheva na tret'ei sessii Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR,” *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*, 13 June 1990.

⁵⁹ Interview with Bill Keller, “Gorbachev's Hope for Future: ‘A Common European Home,’” *New York Times*, 30 November 1989 (italics mine).

⁶⁰ In a news conference in Warsaw, Associated Press (from Warsaw), 21 February 1990.

conference, on 7 June 1990 in Moscow. The declaration adopted at the summit stipulated that efforts would be initiated “to transform it [the Warsaw Treaty] into a treaty of sovereign, equal states that is based on democratic principles.” The “character, functions, and activities of the Warsaw Pact” were to be thoroughly reviewed. The organization was to change from a military alliance to a political organization with military consultation; the centralized, Soviet-controlled command structure was to be abandoned, which in practice meant that a Soviet deputy minister of defense would no longer be the Pact's commander in chief and that perhaps the Supreme Joint Command would be dissolved; the member states would gain control of their own national forces in conformity with the principle of full national sovereignty; and for the duration of the existence of multilateral institutions representatives of the member states would fill positions by rotation.⁶¹ Nothing, however, was said of a possible dissolution of the Pact.

To use the convenient metaphor of departing trains again, the Soviet political leadership was on the Warsaw Pact reform train. In fact, this time it was even in the driver's seat. However, as Georgi Shakhnazarov, Gorbachev's advisor on Eastern European affairs, recognized, most of the member countries of that organization, while negotiating reform, or appearing to do so, were at the same time preparing to leave that train.⁶²

Above all, the new governments in two of the four countries where Soviet troops were stationed, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, made it clear early on that they wanted the Soviet forces out as quickly as possible.⁶³ Gorbachev acceded to these demands. In both cases the withdrawal negotiations dealt almost exclusively with the logistics of the pullout of Soviet forces, not with the principle. Although Soviet negotiators insinuated that unilateral withdrawals would adversely affect the Warsaw Pact's negotiation position at the CFE talks in Vienna, they made no serious effort to try to retain a residual force. During President Vaclav Havel's visit to Moscow in late February, the Czechoslovak and Soviet foreign ministers signed an agreement calling for the bulk of the Central Group of Forces to be out of Czechoslovakia by the end of May 1990 and for all of the troops and equipment to be withdrawn no later than the end of June 1991. On 9 March, Hungarian and Soviet negotiators concluded an agreement that stipulated the same final withdrawal date for the Southern Group of Forces, that is, June 1991. As these negotiations and the Two Plus Four talks progressed, the Polish government revised its position on the German danger and also began calling for the withdrawal of Soviet forces.

These developments put the Soviet Union in an awkward position. In the preceding era, its armed forces had fulfilled important political and strategic functions, foremost, to maintain its vassals in power and safeguard the empire

⁶¹ Text of the declaration as published in *Pravda*, 8 June 1990. Details were to be fleshed out at another meeting that of the Military Committee' on 14-15 June in Strausberg near East Berlin.

⁶² Interview of the author with Shakhnazarov on 3 December 1994, in Providence, Rhode Island.

⁶³ This account draws on Douglas L. Clarke, “Soviet Troop Withdrawals from Eastern Europe,” *Report on Eastern Europe* (Munich, Radio Liberty / Radio Free Europe), 30 March 1990, pp. 43-44, and Daniel N. Nelson, “Watching the Pact Unravel: The Transformation of East European Political-Military Policies,” Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien (Cologne), Research Report, No. 32 (1990).

against external threats. In the form of status of forces agreements, their presence had legal justification. But after the revolutions of 1989, these rationales no longer existed: the socio-economic systems had changed fundamentally; NATO was no longer regarded as a threat; and the legal basis of the presence of Soviet troops was put in doubt. The practical repercussions of these developments on the Soviet forces in Germany were considerable: If the Northern, Central, and Southern Groups of Forces were to be withdrawn, the Western Group of Forces in Germany would find itself in a militarily untenable position. Its supply lines would be cut. Furthermore, after the 18 March elections, these forces would find themselves in a political environment that would make them an unwanted anachronism.

Thus, the universal lack of support for a neutralized Germany, failure of the effort to convince the new Eastern European governments of the attractiveness of a reformed Warsaw Pact, and with Soviet forces being asked to leave the area, Gorbachev had little option but to accede to Western demands.

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