Commentary

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German Unification from the Soviet (Russian) Perspective

Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice caution researchers who seek to analyze turning points leading to the end of the cold war and the reunification of Germany that they face a daunting task. Indeed, under scrutiny, so-called milestones and decisive factors dissolve into a maze of intertwined circumstances and events that constitute the fabric of the complex and elusive phenomenon of human history. The same ambiguity applies to two essential aspects of research on the end of the cold war: sources and interpretations. New sources and new angles may significantly alter our perceptions of the past.

In particular, this effect can be expected from the Soviet perspective of German reunification, including judgments, mistakes, and rationales that guided Soviet policy and especially Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Zelikow and Rice's essay sheds light on the Soviet perspective, which they analyze in greater depth in their book, *Germany Reunified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*.[1] Relying on records stored at the Gorbachev Archive in Moscow, including transcripts of conversations that Gorbachev had with other Soviet leaders, his advisers, and foreign leaders, the authors reveal Gorbachev's "philosophical detachment" on the German question, his delays in formulating diplomatic positions,

1. Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Reunified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

and the reactive, shifting nature of those positions. In a footnote, they observe that "domestic concerns were already shadowing Soviet policy" in 1989. Yet the reasons for Soviet behavior are not independent variables in their story. Zelikow and Rice's analysis (and this can be said about other books written by veterans of the Bush administration)[2] implies that the Soviet leadership did not have much of a choice, given the fast pace of events, the disappearance of their key ally, the German Democratic Republic regime, and the firm, skillful, and bold policies of Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the Bush administration.

Soviet policies, however, deserve careful attention as factors in German reunification. Gorbachev's attitudes and policies played a no less important role in the peaceful outcome of this process than did Washington's firm backing of Kohl. After all, Moscow was the parent of the GDR and for decades regarded it as the cornerstone of Soviet presence in Europe. The motives for relinquishing the GDR without a fight can be as revealing and important for historical interpretation as the outcome itself.

Therefore, the list of independent variables proposed by Zelikow and Rice should be accompanied by other factors that reflect the Soviet perspective, Soviet foreign policy, and the domestic context that determined Gorbachev's attitudes toward German unification. Chronologically, they are as follows:

1. Gorbachev delivers a speech at the UN in December 1988 in which he recognizes the right of self-determination without exception and renounces the use of force in international relations.
2. Gorbachev meets with Chancellor Kohl in Moscow in October 1988 and in the Federal Republic of Germany in June

2. See George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998); and Robert L. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War: An Insider's Account of U.S. Policy in Europe, 1989–1992* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

1989. The Soviet leader regards relations with West Germany as a cornerstone of his policy of East-West integration.
3. Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze turn blind eyes to the opening of the Hungarian-Austrian border that destabilizes the GDR.
4. The Kremlin leadership, immersed in domestic crisis, particularly the issue of Baltic independence, misjudges the consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall (November–December 1989).
5. Gorbachev fails to address the issue of German reunification with President Bush and his team at the Malta summit in December 1989.
6. The Soviet leadership is left in diplomatic isolation at the "Two-plus-Four" negotiations in February and March 1990.
7. In talks with Secretary of State James Baker and President Bush in February and June 1990, Gorbachev accepts their position on a unified Germany as a part of NATO without explicit security guarantees.
8. Gorbachev accepts Kohl's draft treaty between the USSR and a unified Germany without explicit security guarantees from a unified Germany in July 1990.

Naturally, this brief essay cannot address each of these episodes in detail. Fortunately, in one way or another most of them have already been described in scholarly literature.[3] This allows me to focus on a few key issues related to these variables. Where did the issue of German reunification fit in Gorbachev's policy agenda? What was the impact of domestic instability on Gorbachev's control over Soviet foreign policy and its German policy in particular? What was the impact of the Gorbachev factor, that is, the Soviet

3. Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Reunified and Europe Transformed*; Angela E. Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn: Unification, the Soviet Collapse, and the New Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Jacques Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

leader's choices, preferences, and errors? To what extent did U.S. foreign policy constrain Gorbachev in promoting his agenda on Germany?

It is impossible to understand the dynamics of Soviet policy regarding Germany without taking seriously the assumptions and goals of Gorbachev's "new thinking." Among Western scholars, only a few acknowledge that in Gorbachev's relations with the West from 1988 to 1991, the new thinking in effect replaced traditional diplomacy rooted in realpolitik. As Jacques Lévesque notes, one of Gorbachev's principal objectives was "precisely to integrate the USSR into Europe structurally, and as solidly as possible. The disarray and obstinacy which the Soviet leaders demonstrated throughout all the discussions and negotiations surrounding German reunification must be understood in this context."[4]

The renunciation of force was a most important ideological innovation that enabled peaceful reunification of Germany. In internal communications among trusted officials (Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, Dobrynin, Falin, and Cherniaev), Gorbachev said in late October 1988 that he wanted his UN address to "present our worldview philosophy based on the results of [the] last three years. We should stress the process of demilitarization and humanization of our thinking."[5] Western and Eastern Europeans still doubted Gorbachev's sincerity, but the evidence as well as subsequent events demonstrate that he was earnest about renouncing the Brezhnev doctrine. In May 1989, after the publicized use of troops against civilian demonstrators in Tbilisi, Gorbachev said to the Politburo: "We have accepted that even in foreign policy force does not help

4. Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989*, 225. The best Western study on the evolution and importance of the new thinking is by Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

5. Anatoli Cherniaev's notes, October 31, 1988, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation; also see Pavel Palazhchenko, *Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 103–104.

(*nichego ne daiet*). So especially internally—we cannot resort and will not resort to force.''[6]

The new thinking was also relevant to German reunification for another reason. It left the German question, a key issue of Soviet foreign policy at least until the early 1970s, in limbo.[7] Fixated on his plan to integrate the USSR into Europe, Gorbachev began to look at the division of Germany not so much as a cornerstone of the geopolitical status quo but as an antiquated problem inherited from the past that was a major obstacle to his grand multilateral diplomacy of pan-European integration. While his relations worsened with the GDR's conservative and obstinate leader, Erich Honecker, his gaze shifted to the FRG's leadership. After years of boycotting Helmut Kohl because of his support for U.S. missile deployment in Europe and his unfortunate comparison of Gorbachev to Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's minister of propaganda, in October 1986, Gorbachev decided to make the chancellor his friend. A breakthrough came on October 28, 1988, when Kohl met Gorbachev for the first time in the Kremlin. The leaders quickly established a relationship of mutual trust. During his return visit to West Germany on June 11–15, 1989, Gorbachev believed he had secured Kohl's support for perestroika and his idea of a ''common European home.'' In return, he took a tolerant stand when Kohl in effect suggested a joint interference in the affairs of the GDR in order to remove Honecker and encourage changes. Anatoli Cherniaev believes there was a deliberate double meaning in the joint FRG-USSR declaration that singled out from other principles and norms of international rights the ''respect for the right for national self-

6. Cherniaev and Medvedev's notes at the Politburo, May 11, 1989. Discussion of the memorandum of six Politburo members on the situation in the Baltic Republics, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, fond 4, opis 1, and fond 2, opis 3, published in *The Union Could Be Preserved: The White Book: Documents and Facts about the Policy of M. S. Gorbachev to Reform and Preserve the Multi-National State* (Moscow: April Publishers, 1995), 52, 55.

7. Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn*, 72.

determination.''[8] At the same time, Kohl privately assured Gorbachev that he and his government did not want "any destabilization" of the GDR.[9] This relationship was as crucial to the subsequent peaceful reunification of Germany as the relationship between Willy Brandt and Leonid Brezhnev had been to détente in the early 1970s.

Gorbachev and his advisers chose to trust Kohl because they needed his friendship. As a result, the Soviet leadership overlooked Kohl's exploitation of the growing instability in Eastern Europe to promote his agenda. On August 25, 1989, Kohl reached an understanding with the reformist leadership of Hungary to open the Hungarian-Austrian border to defectors from the GDR. In return, Hungary received DM 1 billion to cover its budget deficit. The details of this understanding, fateful for the GDR, came to light only years later.[10] What intelligence Moscow received is still unknown. But during Gorbachev's trip to Berlin to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the GDR, Honecker told him that Miklos Nemeth had received from the Social Democratic Party (SDP) a loan of DM 550 million on the condition that "Hungarians opened a border with Austria.''[11] One may guess that Gorbachev, skeptical about anything that Erich Honecker said, dismissed this information.

When the crisis erupted in the GDR, Mikhail Gorbachev continued to rely on Kohl's personal assurances. As Lévesque points out, his major goal at the time remained the same, "but the whole problem was in the synchronization" between the Soviet-European

8. Third conversation of General Secretary Gorbachev and Chancellor Kohl, Bonn, (June 1989), notes of Cherniaev provided to the National Security Archive, Washington, DC.

9. Ibid.

10. Conversations of Chancellor Kohl and Foreign Minister Genscher with Prime Minister Nemeth and Foreign Minister Horn, Palais Gymnich, August 25, 1989, published in *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik: Deutsche Einheit: Sonderedition aus den Akten des Bundeskanzleramtes 1989/90*, ed. Hanns Juergen Kusters and Daniel Hoffmann (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1998), 377–382.

11. Gorbachev's conversation with Erich Honecker, October 7, 1989, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, document provided to the National Security Archive, Washington, DC, by Cherniaev.

integration and the creation of a new security system on the one hand, and the pace of German reunification on the other.[12] In a telephone conversation with the Soviet leader on October 11, 1989, Kohl said: "The only thing that we want [is] that the GDR joins your course, the course of progressive reforms. . . . We do not intend to agitate them [the population of the GDR], urge them to any actions that later might lead others to criticize us." Gorbachev eagerly accepted the renewed reassurances.[13]

In another telephone conversation after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Kohl reaffirmed his rejection of any course "for radicalization" of dynamics in the GDR "in any form." Gorbachev responded that relations among the USSR, the FRG, and the GDR should be "a triangle where everything should be well-considered and well-balanced. I believe that our present relationship allows [us] to do it this way." He warned that any "forced acceleration of events" might lead to "chaos."[14] When Kohl unilaterally proclaimed his Ten-Point Plan in December 1989 and shifted to the policy of *Wandel durch Kraft* (change through strength) with regard to the GDR, Gorbachev at first interpreted it as a preelection maneuver by the chancellor. He could not believe that Kohl had betrayed his trust.[15] When he realized his mistake a few days later, he expressed his feelings to Hans-Dietrich Genscher rather than to Kohl himself. It would be incorrect to ascribe Gorbachev's displeasure merely to his realization that he had no countermeasures against Kohl's program, a realization that came only at the end of January 1990. Rather, this shows that Gorbachev continued to put

12. Lévesque, *The Enigma of 1989*, 227.

13. From a telephone conversation between General Secretary Gorbachev and Chancellor Kohl, October 11, 1989, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, provided to the National Security Archive, Washington, DC, by Cherniaev.

14. From a telephone conversation between General Secretary Gorbachev and Chancellor Kohl, November 11, 1989, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, provided to the National Security Archive, Washington, DC, by Cherniaev.

15. From a telephone conversation between General Secretary Gorbachev and Giulio Andreotti, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Italy, Rome, November 29, 1989, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, provided to the National Security Archive, Washington, DC, by Cherniaev.

his other goals well above the German question and for that reason saw no alternatives to partnership with Kohl, despite his intense displeasure with his actions.

The primacy of the integrationist agenda over the dangers of the German question may also explain the otherwise inexplicable failure of Gorbachev to address the events in Germany in a systematic manner. There was no "fire brigade" or "crisis group" on Germany in the Soviet leadership. Nor was Gorbachev interested in engaging Bush on this issue at the Malta summit on December 2–3, 1989. He also "forfeited a chance to define the agenda"[16] when he rebuffed Kohl's proposal to come to Moscow for a talk after he announced his Ten-Point Plan. The first special meeting on Germany took place on January 27, 1990, two and one-half months after the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

A second issue is the impact of the domestic crisis on Gorbachev's German policy. President Bush frequently expressed his conviction that there could have been a much more aggressive and violent reaction to the collapse of the Berlin Wall from the Soviet side. In particular, he pointed to the hard-liners in the Soviet leadership and the frustrated military. Most scholars of German reunification imply that Gorbachev had to look over his shoulder at Egor Ligachev and other hard-liners in the Politburo and elsewhere. Also, Shevardnadze and his assistant Sergei Tarasenko later recalled their concern that the German question might undermine Gorbachev and his policies. The memories of war with Nazi Germany still colored public opinion in the Soviet Union, and there was a potential threat that Gorbachev might be blamed for selling the shop in dealing with the GDR.[17]

Indeed, by early 1990, government officials and military leaders carried on an open discussion in the Soviet media regarding available options for dealing with the German issue. Yet, the available

16. Quote from Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, 147.

17. Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn*, 101; Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, 445, fn 118.

evidence does not indicate any real danger to Gorbachev's position from any opposition groups from the winter of 1989 through the spring of 1990. While it is true that Gorbachev unleashed forces that he ultimately could not control, those forces had the temporary effect of rallying the old political and bureaucratic elites around their leader. The party functionaries raised in the tradition of total obedience to the supreme leader could not think of expressing any political opposition to Gorbachev. As a result, despite growing domestic criticism of his leadership, Gorbachev retained firm control over Soviet foreign policy. He made decisions on most important questions not at the Politburo but among his narrow circle of advisers or, in some cases, together with Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. As this method of decision making was a natural prerogative of the general secretary, it was not contested. Leading figures with hard-line reputations, such as Egor Ligachev, had no foreign policy experience and did not contest, either then or later, Gorbachev's right as the party's general secretary to monopolize foreign affairs.

Only in the spring of 1990 did the domestic backlash begin to focus on the "loss" of the GDR.[18] Preemptively, Gorbachev threatened at a stormy Politburo meeting on May 3, 1990, to scuttle, if necessary, the Vienna arms control talks and strategic weapons talks in order to prevent a unified Germany from gaining membership in NATO. A milder position developed by Shevardnadze and his assistant Tarasenko was cosponsored by Aleksandr Yakovlev, Minister of Defense Dmitri Yazov, and KGB chairman Vladimir Kriuchkov, who accepted Gorbachev's stance without argument.[19]

Nevertheless, even at that time domestic pressure for a hard line was counterbalanced by another domestic concern: the rapidly developing economic and financial crisis of the USSR. By early 1990,

18. Cherniaev, *Shest Let s Gorbachevym: Po dnevnikovym zapisiam* (Moscow: Progress-Kultura, 1993), 347.

19. On this episode, see Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Reunified and Europe Transformed*, 224–245.

the Soviet economy was practically bankrupt and in desperate need of Western loans. As Gorbachev threatened a tough stand on German membership in NATO, Cherniaev reminded him that this "blackmail" would have been "too risky, above all from [an] economic viewpoint."[20] Zelikow and Rice note that the Soviets contacted Bonn with requests for a large loan on May 7–8.[21] Yet Gorbachev began to solicit Bush for money as early as the Malta summit.

Domestic pressures affected Gorbachev's German policies in other indirect ways. In the fall of 1989 he was immersed in domestic politics, particularly at the sessions of the Congress of People's Deputies that he chaired, and other crisis situations at home. The main issues that determined Gorbachev's political future were failing political and economic reforms (perestroika) and growing domestic instability, particularly the calls for independence in the south Caucasus and the Baltic states. Characteristically, on November 9, 1989, a few hours before the Berlin Wall fell, the Politburo was in session discussing the separatist claims of the Baltic republics.[22] This continued to be the hottest issue during the key months of January through March 1990, when the outlines of German reunification were taking place. For Moscow policymakers, the preservation of the Soviet Union psychologically overshadowed issues of foreign policy.[23] It is plausible that domestic issues, including the crisis in the Baltic states, prevented Gorbachev and

20. Cherniaev's notes to General Secretary Gorbachev, May 4, 1990, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, fond 2 (Cherniaev's papers), opis 1. For the excellent exploration of the financial crisis in the USSR see: Egor Gaidar, *Gibel Imperii. Uroki dlia sovremennoi Rossii* [Demise of the Empire. The Lessons for Today's Russia] (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006).

21. Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, 256–259.

22. Minutes of Cherniaev, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, fond 2, opis 3, published with excerpts in A. B. Veber and A. S. Cherniaev, *Soiuz mozhno bylo sokhranit* [The Union Could be Preserved] (Moscow: Aprel'-85, 1995), 75–77.

23. The diaries of Gorbachev's main foreign policy assistant, Anatoli Cherniaev, from the spring of 1989 to the spring of 1990 are peppered with pessimism, even despair, regarding the future of the Soviet Union and Gorbachev's reforms. See Cherniaev, *Shest Let*, 294–295, 337–338.

the Soviet leadership from focusing sufficiently on the German crisis.

Increasingly, Gorbachev devoted himself to the business of building personal relationships with foreign leaders and pursuing the general goal of ending the cold war on the basis of East-West integration. He delegated to Shevardnadze and his assistants the tactics and modalities of Soviet policies on particular foreign policy issues, including the German question. Many important specific issues were discussed and resolved along back channels between Horst Teltschik and Cherniaev, as well as between Shevardnadze, his assistant Sergei Tarasenko, and James Baker, Dennis Ross, and Robert Zoellick.[24] It is unclear to what extent Gorbachev kept track of all this.

This growing laxness accompanied by elements of chaos in the formerly centralized Soviet foreign policy may explain the enigmatic episode at the Ottawa negotiations in February 1990 when Shevardnadze accepted the Western change from the "Four-plus-Two" to the "Two-plus-Four" formula. In the war of recollections, Valentin Falin claimed this was done unilaterally and without instructions, while Cherniaev argued that the whole issue made no sense because it was already politically impossible to insist on the occupation rights of the four powers over East and West Germany. In the discussion on January 27, however, it was Cherniaev who corrected Gorbachev (who apparently saw no difference between the two formulas) and proposed the "Four-plus-Two" version as the basis for Shevardnadze's instructions.[25] And it was Cherniaev who wrote to Gorbachev on May 4 to say that Shevardnadze indeed "arbitrarily agreed to change the formula into 'Two-plus-Four,' although both Thatcher and Mitterrand were ready to support us."[26] Shevardnadze apparently got away easily with this and other mistakes.

24. Sergei Tarasenko and Robert Zoellick, in conversations with the author.

25. Cherniaev's notes of the meeting, which he provided to the Thomas Watson Institute of Brown University and the National Security Archives.

26. Cherniaev's notes to General Secretary Gorbachev, May 4, 1990, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, fond 2 (Cherniaev's papers), opis 1.

The Soviet Union's remarkable acquiescence with the destruction of the GDR and unified Germany's membership in NATO is ultimately explained by Gorbachev himself—his personality, choices, judgments, and temperament. Western leaders were frequently amazed and overjoyed that the Soviet leader voluntarily gave them what they had expected to obtain only through hard bargaining and mutual concessions. As a result, the United States and West Germany achieved optimal political results without having to accept any binding legal commitments or limitations on their future behavior.[27]

It is tempting to explain Gorbachev's attitudes from the angle of realism. Zelikow and Rice write that the U.S. and West German governments discreetly decided in February 1990 to proceed with the annexation of the GDR within the framework of NATO, even if the Soviets stalled.[28] Indeed, by early 1990 the Soviet leadership had few levers left beyond the presence of their troops in the GDR. Gorbachev's advocates also claim that he understandably misjudged the situation in the GDR after the collapse of the wall. Indeed, in November and December no one expected that the GDR would begin to disintegrate so quickly that there would be no transition period at all.[29]

Gorbachev's conversations at the time and Cherniaev's notes to Gorbachev support these explanations, yet much of Gorbachev's behavior remains difficult to understand. In general, as I have argued earlier, Gorbachev's belief in his new thinking allowed him to see German developments in a light that was radically detached from traditional geopolitical worries. In November and even December of 1989, Thatcher and Mitterrand appeared to be more

27. See Cherniaev, "Ob'edineniie Germanii: Politicheskiie mekhanizmy i psikhologicheskie stereotipy," *Svobodnaia Misl*, August 1997, 25–34; Alexander Galkin and Anatoli Cherniaev, "Pravdu, i tolko pravdu: Razmyshleniia po povodu vosppominanii," *Svobodnaia Misl*, January-February 1994, 19–29.

28. Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, 246.

29. Galkin and Cherniaev, "Pravdu," 23.

concerned than Gorbachev was about the fall of the wall and the future of the GDR. Gorbachev took his own ideas too seriously and was too detached from pragmatic considerations. New thinking took precedence over not only the immediate interests of the negotiating process but also Soviet interests.

From the very beginning of the German crisis, Gorbachev voluntarily renounced both direct and indirect use of force. He also refrained from political and economic pressure on the GDR and other Eastern European states. This left the Soviet leadership with only diplomatic means to influence the situation in Germany on the eve of reunification. When Kohl launched his campaign for reunification, Gorbachev never consistently pursued a campaign of counterpressure. Despite encouragement from Thatcher and Mitterrand to bolster the GDR leadership and confront Kohl, Gorbachev never exerted serious effort on either count.

Gorbachev's friends argue that the Soviet leader demonstrated a high moral standard of statesmanship and global responsibility by rejecting the art of diplomacy and narrow gamesmanship.[30] It is not clear, however, why one excluded the other. Gorbachev's partners in the West managed to combine the same degree of responsibility and statesmanship with considerable skills in achieving their diplomatic aims. The explanation lies not so much in the realization of the unfavorable balance of forces (by his inaction, Gorbachev made this balance even more unfavorable) as in the combination of personal predilections and the ideological self-image of the Soviet leader.

With his messianic streak, Gorbachev viewed himself not only as a Soviet leader but as a global statesman. Cherniaev, in many ways an alter ego of Gorbachev, though more direct, jotted in his diary after the fall of the Berlin Wall: ''A total dismantling of socialism as a world phenomenon has been taking place. This may be inevitable and good. For this is a reunification of mankind on the

30. Ibid.

basis of common sense. And a common fellow from Stavropol [Gorbachev] set this process in motion.''[31]

Gorbachev had a personal aversion to confrontation and forceful projection of power. He preferred compromise and consensus in both domestic and foreign policy. The Bush administration relied on Gorbachev's commonsense acceptance that the United States had won the cold war and could dictate its outcome. On October 11, 1989, Bush told NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner that the main objective was to persuade the Soviets to allow continued change in Eastern Europe and the GDR. When Wörner warned that Gorbachev would not let the GDR leave the Warsaw Pact, Bush wondered if he could persuade Gorbachev that the military value of the Warsaw Pact was no longer essential and he should let it go. ''That may seem naïve,'' Bush said, ''but who predicted the changes we are seeing today?''[32] One could hardly imagine any U.S. leader trying to persuade Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, or Andropov to relinquish Soviet influence in Europe.

At Malta, Gorbachev, who was eager to develop a personal partnership with Bush, avoided taking a confrontational stance on Germany. After criticizing Kohl's Ten-Point Plan, he sidestepped the issue of the military and political status of a unified Germany, stating that ''it would be *premature to discuss now one* [neutrality] *or the other* [membership in NATO] *scenario*.'' He continued by saying, ''There are two German states, so history ordered. And let history now decide how the process should evolve and where it should lead to in the context of [a] new Europe and the new world.''[33] From the U.S. perspective, Gorbachev did not exclude the option of NATO's advance to the East.

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31. Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, fond 2, opis 2. This entry was omitted from Cherniaev, *1991 god: Dnevnik Pomoschnika Prezidenta SSSR* (Moscow: TERRA, 1997).

32. The record of the meeting is cited in Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, 398–399.

33. Soviet record of a one-on-one conversation between General Secretary Gorbachev and President Bush, December 2, 1989, Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation.

Returning to Zelikow and Rice's thesis about the limited choices Gorbachev had by February 1990, one may wonder what would have happened if the Soviet leadership had consistently advocated binding legal commitments for NATO not to advance to the East. Given the complexities of European and German public opinion, particularly widespread uneasiness about Germany's expansion and the position of Mitterrand and Thatcher, it is not at all clear that Kohl and Bush would have been able to proceed while totally ignoring Soviet demands for security guarantees.

Gorbachev's performance during German reunification was as much a reflection of his personal political style as of his domestic policy of perestroika. Foes and friends alike highlight Gorbachev's "ad hocism," his characteristic lack of a long-range strategic plan, and his aversion to the practical details of governance. They all recognize that perestroika had no plan and the new thinking was vague and could not be a practical guide for reform. Gorbachev's favorite phrases, in addition to "unpredictability," were "let processes develop" and "processes are on the run" (*protsessi poshli*). In the judgment of one of his sympathizers, Gorbachev's leadership mirrored his excessively optimistic view of people in general, and the Russian populace in particular. "It always seemed to him that people could not help but be glad to organize their own lives for themselves."[34] Gorbachev addressed the German question with similar historic optimism and "ad hocism," as abundantly illustrated by his repeated allusions to history. Zelikow and Rice describe how, on his visit to Berlin in October 1989, Gorbachev oddly quoted the Russian poet Fedor Tiutchev, who wrote that instead of "iron and blood . . . we will try to forge [German unity] with love." While it certainly inspired Wim Wenders, it was, as U.S. scholars and politicians note, "a strange way for the leader of the Soviet Union to warn the FRG to respect the 'postwar realities.' "[35]

34. Dmitri Furman, "Fenomen Gorbacheva," *Svobodnaia Misl*, November 1995, 65.

35. Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, 83.

Gorbachev's advocates assert that there was "a conceptual-moral, if one may use this term, recognition that it is abnormal to divide forcibly a great nation and it is wrong to condemn the entire people forever for the crimes of its leaders."[36]

Gorbachev's moral standing paid off for him personally and for the future relationship between Germany and Russia. In the meantime, however, the Soviet Union and then Russia were marginalized in the process of European integration and building European security.

Finally, a few words on the impact of U.S. leadership on the Kremlin during the process of German reunification. In the months leading to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the Bush administration displayed as little foresight as Gorbachev and his assistants concerning the dynamics in Germany. No U.S. officials predicted the rapid developments that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Even after the event, only a few of them, particularly Ambassador Vernon Walters, believed that German reunification would take place within a few years, and nobody foresaw that it would occur within one year. The Bush administration, however, gained a huge strategic advantage over Gorbachev when Bush decided to stand firmly behind Kohl in support of his course of annexation of the GDR. Bush was also as effective in quelling the brewing anti-unification sentiments among NATO allies as Gorbachev was ineffective in exploiting them.

Zelikow and Rice point persuasively to several levers that the Bush administration possessed by January 1990. They include:

- the commitment of Bush since the summer of 1989 to avoid destabilization of Eastern Europe, demonstrated during his visit to Poland and Hungary;
- the commitment of Bush at the Malta summit in December 1989 to give direct and indirect assistance to Gorbachev and his course of perestroika; and

36. Galkin and Cherniaev, "Pravdu," 22.

- the agreement of Bush at the Malta summit to maintain neutrality toward the movements for national liberation in the Baltic states as long as Gorbachev refrained from the use of force there.

The U.S. impact on Gorbachev and Soviet policy, however, was exerted more through persuasion than containment and coercion, much to the credit of President Bush and his assistants. Bush's style reassured Gorbachev while helping him make concessions without looking like a pawn in American hands. The most important moments in this regard were the Malta summit, a meeting with Secretary James Baker in February 1990, and the Washington summit of June 1990.

U.S. tactics of persuasion would not have been so effective had Gorbachev and certain members of his team not been eager to become close partners with Bush. This was a unique, perhaps unprecedented, time when the politicians and analysts of the dying Soviet superpower developed psychological dependence on their former enemies and geopolitical rivals. This undoubtedly was the product of Soviet domestic pressures, which also played a role in the talks on German unification. Increasingly beleaguered at home and estranged from conservative, hard-line colleagues, Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, Cherniaev, and Tarasenko began to look at their foreign counterparts as allies and trusted friends. With the exception of Gorbachev himself, they also feared an imminent collapse of the USSR and the reform movement. In late February 1990, Cherniaev noted in his diary that he had spoken with Thatcher's foreign policy assistant, Percy Cradock, ''without any self-censorship'' and completely forgot he was not one of the ''comrades.''[37] U.S. as well as West German statesmen and diplomats exploited this unique mood without fully understanding its nature and causes. A similar forthcoming and candid attitude from their side would have qualified as treason.

37. Cherniaev, *1991 god*, 28.

Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, and their assistants dismiss the notion that there were significant events following the collapse of the Berlin Wall that stimulated the German people to express their will for unification. With the wisdom of hindsight, they deny that different Soviet policies could have produced different outcomes. At the same time, in an essay published in 1997, Cherniaev regrets that the collapse of the USSR and other radical changes in the international environment precluded "the Moscow-Berlin axis." This, he writes, would have become "the decisive factor of the real European process" in integration, but it "degenerated into the process of NATO expansion."[38] However, in January 1990, long before the Soviet Union collapsed, Cherniaev predicted the same result: "It is increasingly obvious that [a] 'Common European Home' will exist (if it will!) without us, without the USSR, and for a while we will live as 'neighbors.' "[39]

It is hoped that this modest analysis will help to restore the notion that diplomacy was important after all. The Russian perspective, informed by international research, allows us to discern the moments when a more energetic, systematic, pragmatic, and realist form of Soviet diplomacy might have altered the process of German reunification and the future course of European history. If Gorbachev had possessed the will and foresight for preemptive diplomacy, perhaps his partners in the United States would feel somewhat less dominant today. Contempt for the "cynical traditionalists of diplomacy," as expressed by some of Gorbachev's friends in an effort to protect him from later criticism, is irrelevant in a balanced historical analysis.

38. Cherniaev, "Ob'edineniie Germanii," 25, 34.
39. Cherniaev, *1991 god*, 27.