

NORMAN M. NAIMARK

THE SUPERPOWERS AND 1989 IN EASTERN EUROPE

Given the sheer importance of the East European revolutions of 1989, there is understandably no shortage of scholarly and journalistic work on their history.¹ The many works that appeared in anticipation of the twentieth anniversary of the momentous events of that year compliment a rich literature of memoirs and analyses that appeared in the 1990s, as observers sought to understand the origins, course, and consequences of the *annus mirabilis*. Some of these works focus on the end of communism in individual countries. Some seek to explain the larger forces at work in the region that set off the domino-like collapse of old regimes and the birth of the new. Some pay more attention to Gorbachev and his role in undermining the stability of the region and the will of communist elites to maintain their antiquated political and economic systems intact. Others emphasize the dynamics of the international system and how they encouraged (or, in some cases, discouraged) the changes that swept over Eastern and East Central Europe in that year. In this connection, numerous studies focus on the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, and their influence on the events of 1989 and the recasting of the late Cold War world as a result.

All of the work on the superpower context of 1989 builds on the first-hand memoirs of participants in the events. On the American side, the memoirs of George Herbert Walker Bush and Brent Scowcroft, of James Baker III, and of Robert Gates present a more or less official take on the contribution of Washington to the peaceful outcome of the East European revolutions.² Particularly useful in understanding the thoughts and actions of American statesmen during this critical period are the memoirs/analyses of Robert Hutchings, who served in the

¹ I owe a special debt of gratitude to my research assistant, Valentin Bolotnyy, for his excellent work on this project. I would also like to thank Prof. Thomas W. Simons, Jr., for his helpful comments on the original draft.

For the East European revolutions, see Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: the Revolution of '89 witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

² George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998); James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1995); Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). For a critical assessment of the first months, especially, of Bush administration policy from the perspective of the previous administration of Ronald Reagan, see George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993).

National Security Council, and Jack Matlock, US ambassador to Moscow.³ Condoleezza Rice and Philip Zelikow, both of whom were in the White House at the time, were able to use classified documents to construct the story of the fall of the Wall and the unification of Germany in a more scholarly fashion.⁴

Especially since the Soviet Union collapsed soon after the 1989 events, Soviet officials were no less anxious than American ones to put their understanding of the events of 1989 in print, starting with Mikhail Gorbachev and Eduard Shevardnadze.⁵ Soviet policymaking in this period was confined to a small circle of advisors around Gorbachev, and their memoirs and diaries provide unusual insight into Moscow's understanding of what was taking place in Eastern Europe. Certainly, the most impressive and revealing are Anatolii Chernyaev's diaries, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, which also appeared in abbreviated form in English.⁶ Many of Gorbachev's advisors subsequently also gave long interviews and participated in conferences on 1989, where their interpretations of events were recorded and, in some cases, later published.⁷

The memoirs of Soviet and American leaders are complimented by those of Europeans who both participated in and observed the events of 1989 from the perspective of their own countries' interests. Particularly impressive in this con-

³ Robert L. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War: An Insider's Account of US Policy in Europe, 1989–1992* (Washington, DC: Wilson Center, 1997); Jack Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador's Account of the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Random House, 1995).

⁴ Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁵ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1996). See also Mikhail Gorbachev and Zdenek Mlynar, *Conversations with Gorbachev: on Perestroika, the Prague Spring, and the Crossroads of Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

⁶ A. Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod: Dnevnik dukh epokh 1972–1991 goda* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008). For briefer English language memoirs, see Anatoly Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). Among others in English, see, for example, Valery Boldin, *Ten Years That Shook the World: The Gorbachev Era as Witnessed by His Chief of Staff* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Pavel Palazchenko, *My Years with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze: The Memoir of a Soviet Interpreter* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1997); Andrei Grachev, *Gorbachev's Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008). For notes on Politburo meetings, see A. Chernyaev, A. Veber, and V. Medvedev, eds., *V Politbyuro TsK KPSS, 1985–91* (Moscow: Alpina, 2006).

⁷ See, especially, Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010). Similarly, the National Security Archive's "End of the Cold War Collection" holds numerous documents on the superpowers' role in 1989. My thanks to Svetlana Savranskaya for sending me draft copies of these works and allowing me to cite them in the original paper. See also the Hoover Institution Archives (hereafter HIA), Hoover Institution-Gorbachev Foundation Collection (hereafter HIGFC), for a series of interviews with prominent Soviet and American officials about this period. The archives of the Gorbachev Foundation in Moscow hold many similar documents.

nection are the memoirs of Helmut Kohl and the diaries of his chief advisor, Horst Teltschik.⁸ The views of Margaret Thatcher and François Mitterrand are also important to understanding the international politics of the period.⁹

There is surprisingly no shortage of available archival material on 1989. Part of the reason is that the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union was put on trial by the Yeltsin government and its archives were seized and placed in the hands of the Russian State Archives Administration. As a result, Central Committee and Politburo materials from 1989 are readily accessible for research and even available in published form.¹⁰ The Gorbachev Foundation in Moscow and the Hoover Institution at Stanford University hold documents from and memoirs of the period that were in the personal hands of Gorbachev's team of advisors. Some historians have successfully used East European archives to reconstruct great-power motives and actions during the crisis year of 1989.¹¹ The East German archives are particularly useful for this purpose, since the East German state was dissolved as was the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED), leaving their archives fully available for research.¹² While Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Romanian, and Bulgarian successor states still protect some archives of the period, there is no GDR successor state to protect its former holdings. Its archives, including those of the SED and of the State Security Service (the *Staatssicherheitsdienst*, the Stasi), can be thought of as stored in a butcher shop, where various body parts are hung out for display and can be investigated pretty much at will. Of course, much was destroyed in the last months of the GDR, between the demonstrations

⁸ Helmut Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1982–1990* (Munich: Droemer, 2005); Horst Teltschik, *329 Tage: Innenansichten der Einigung* (Berlin: Siedler, 1991).

⁹ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: Harper Collins, 1993); David Bell, *Francois Mitterrand* (Cambridge: Polity 2005); Frederic Bozo, "Mitterrand's France, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification: A Reappraisal," *Cold War History* 7, no. 4 (2007): 455–78, 457–59; John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher* (London: Pimlico, 2004).

¹⁰ Interesting materials on 1989 are available on microfilm in fond 89 in the Hoover Institution Archives, as well as in other major repositories in the United States. Similarly, Central Committee materials are also available at Hoover in microfiche: "Plenumy Tsentral'nogo Komiteta Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941–1990. Iz fonda Rossiiskogo Gosudarstvennogo Arkhiva Noveishei Istorii." Politburo materials can be found in Chernyaev, Veber, Medvedev, eds., *V Polityuro*.

¹¹ See especially Mark Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 178–256. On Poland, see Gregory F. Domber, "Rumblings in Eastern Europe: Western Pressure on Poland's Moves Towards Democratic Transformation," in Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, and Leopoldo Nuti, eds., *Europe and the End of the Cold War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 58–61.

¹² For fruitful use of the East German archives, see Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create a Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), and Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Der Fall der Mauer: die unbeabsichtigte Selbstaflösung des SED-Staates*, 2nd ed. (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999). See also Andreas Rödder, *Deutschland einig Vaterland: Die Geschichte der Wiedervereinigung* (Munich: Beck, 2009).

of October 1989 and the election of a non-communist government in March 1990. Apparently, even Vladimir Putin, then a KGB operative in the GDR, was so hard at work burning documents in Dresden that his furnace broke down.¹³

Documentary material is also available on the policies of the US government in 1989, though with many restrictions. The National Security Archive in Washington, D.C. has done yeoman's work in submitting Freedom of Information Act petitions to declassify US materials from 1989, in particular those documents used by Rice and Zelikow in the study mentioned above.¹⁴

Many scholarly studies touch on the problems of the superpower relationship and the revolutions of 1989 that are broached in this chapter. Perhaps the most comprehensive is Melvyn Leffler's *For the Soul of Mankind*.¹⁵ Mary Elise Sarotte has written an intriguing account of the international dynamics behind the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany.¹⁶ There are a number of important scholarly books that tell the story of the fall of the Wall and the end of communism in Eastern Europe, including several interesting journalistic studies.¹⁷ Several worthwhile collections of articles have appeared from conferences marking the twentieth anniversary of the fall of communist rule in Eastern Europe.¹⁸ Focusing more on Gorbachev and his policies that led to the breakup of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe are Vladislav Zubok's *A Failed Empire*, Hannes Adomeit's *Imperial Overstretch*, and Archie Brown's *Seven Years that Changed the World*.¹⁹ Stephen Kotkin and Jan Tomasz Gross have published a provocative

¹³ Sarotte, 1989, 93.

¹⁴ NSA, George Washington University. The holdings include important CIA reports, Moscow summit files, ambassadorial cables, a "Solidarity" collection, and other things. See also the references in footnote 8 above.

¹⁵ Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

¹⁶ Sarotte, 1989. See also Alexander von Plato, *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands: Ein weltpolitisches Machtspiel*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: Links, 2003).

¹⁷ See György Dalos, *Der Vorhang geht auf: Das Ende der Diktaturen in Osteuropa* (Munich: Beck, 2009); Michael Meyer, *The Year that Changed the World: The Untold Story Behind the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Scribner, 2009); Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Fall of the Soviet Empire* (New York: Pantheon, 2009). I want to thank Timothy Garton Ash for referring me to these and other recent books. They are included in an insightful review essay by him about the literature on the revolutions of that year: "1989!" *The New York Review of Books* 56, no. 17 (2009).

¹⁸ See, in particular, Jeffrey Engel, ed., *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Olaf Njolstad, ed., *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation* (London: Frank Cass, 2004). See also the special issue John Connelly and Amir Weiner, eds. "Revisiting 1989," *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 3 (2009).

¹⁹ Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Hannes Adomeit, *Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998); Archie Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

study of 1989 that focuses on the weaknesses of Gorbachev and the communist elites in the East.²⁰ Using a different tack, Mark Kramer has published a series of articles that emphasize the ways in which these elites were undermined by Gorbachev's actions, as well as his policies.²¹ The secondary literature is remarkably strong, in part because the singular importance of the fall of communism to the international system makes its analysis central to understanding the past and future of world politics.²²

The basic argument of this paper is that the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, were further behind the eight ball in 1989—the trajectory of events and their accurate analysis—and thus their potential influence on these events, than the scholarly literature and especially the memoirs lead us to believe. Both Moscow and Washington were attached to the post-World War II Cold War order, which had guaranteed their primacy in international affairs. The rapid changes in Eastern Europe in 1989 challenged their image of themselves and of their relationship with each other. The corollary of this argument is that the East Europeans were the primary initiators of the revolutions of 1989, both in the failures of their communist leaderships and the initiatives of civil society (and the crowds of demonstrators), while the superpowers tended to react to events rather than to lead them.²³

I use the term “superpowers” here in both an ironic and heuristic way: ironic because the supposed freedom of action and ability to exert power at will that is inherent in the concept of a superpower was almost completely lacking on both the American and Soviet sides; heuristic because this very condition of helplessness in face of the force of events is instructive in helping us understand what it really meant to be a superpower in the late Cold War world. It is certainly true that until the very end of the Cold War the Soviet Union and the United States were capable of destroying each other and a good part of the world, not to mention Europe, in a full-scale military confrontation. But, at the same time, the superpowers were hamstrung by the East European crisis of 1989, in part unable, and in part unwilling to interfere in events beyond their control.

²⁰ Stephen Kotkin, with a contribution from Jan T. Gross, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Random House, 2009).

²¹ Kramer, “The Collapse (Part 1),” 178–256; (Part 2), *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 3–64; (Part 3), *ibid.* 7, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 3–96. On this issue, see also Jacques Levesque, *The Enigma of 1989: The USSR and the Liberation of Eastern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

²² Saki Ruth Dockrill, *The End of the Cold War Era: The Transformation of the Global Security Order* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005).

²³ See Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down* and Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York: Random House, 1990). For similar arguments focusing on the East Europeans, cf. Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolutions: Central Europe in 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

In making this argument, it is important to note that there is plenty of evidence to support a different kind of picture of 1989, one that grants more foresight, understanding, and wisdom to both the Kremlin and the White House. Robert Hutchings and Condoleezza Rice and Philip Zelikow, for example, have written well-documented and convincing studies of American policy that underline its careful formulation and well-considered execution.²⁴ In excellent studies of Gorbachev's policies toward Eastern Europe, both Jacques Levesque and Mark Kramer emphasize a history of deep and ongoing Soviet involvement in Eastern Europe that was highly influential and consequential in the events of 1989.²⁵ Despite these convincing renditions of events, there is much in the documents that lead one to different conclusions; the purpose of this paper is to explore some of that evidence.

Twenty years after the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe is an excellent juncture to return to the *annus mirabilis* and to review the events of that year through the perspective of the documents and memoirs that have been made available since. Paradoxically, the sources for working on the superpowers and 1989 in Eastern Europe are much fuller and more detailed than those for working on similar questions regarding 1949, or, for that matter, 1939, certainly from the Soviet and East European side.

The major problem for any historian trying to deal with the revolutions of 1989 is not sources, but rather narrative. How does one reconstruct these events, place them in orderly chronological progression and appropriate context without taking away the surprises, contingencies, and anxiety built into the situation in Eastern Europe at the time? The post-hoc reconstruction of events tends to make matters too logical and too comprehensible. But this is not just a matter of subsequent historical accounts of 1989. If one reads the documents from the period, even those produced by the best of reporters, like Jack Matlock, US ambassador in Moscow, one is left with a genuinely bifurcated understanding of the perceptions of the day.²⁶ There is an awareness of profound upheaval in the spring and summer of 1989, but the bottom line of most analyses from the time was that the crisis would pass, or, more often, would take years to resolve, when in fact communism would fall to everyone's surprise within the year. This is true for both the American and Soviet sides of the superpower equation.

The Americans

Given their superpower status, one might have thought that the Soviet Union and the United States at least knew what was going on in Eastern Europe through

²⁴ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*; Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 8. Hutchings argues, for example, that it was a "myth" that "the world was caught unprepared for 1989."

²⁵ Kramer, "The Collapse (Part 1)," Levesque, *The Enigma*.

²⁶ See Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*.

their superannuated intelligence agencies. However, this does not appear to have been the case, at least not consistently so. The CIA, for example, routinely overestimated the economic strength of the GDR.²⁷ On the Soviet side, there was clearly shock and incredulity in the Kremlin as first Egon Krenz and then Hans Modrow brought to Moscow the real story of the completely hopeless condition of the East German economy.²⁸ While there was indeed a dissenting CIA report from September 1989 that predicted an imminent challenge to the stability of the Soviet Union, the National Intelligence Assessment of October 1989, a consensus intelligence document from the same period, predicted much more optimistically that Gorbachev would survive the coming economic crisis of 1990–91 and encouraged the Bush administration to embrace Gorbachev wholeheartedly at Malta in December 1989.²⁹ Even former Secretary of State George Shultz mentions with disdain the inability of the CIA to come up with a reliable analysis of Soviet strengths and weaknesses during the final years of the Reagan administration. “I think,” he states, “the U.S. intelligence about the Soviet Union was very poor. It misjudged the size and strength of the Soviet economy.”³⁰

There is no reason for academics to gloat; many of their predictions and prescriptions were as behind the pace of events as those of government analysts.³¹ Of course, the inability to understand what was at stake in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was not just about a failure in intelligence; on both sides, politicians heard and understood what they wanted to from their respective intelligence agencies.³² One of Moscow’s most experienced foreign policy analysts, Valentin Falin, states that he warned Gorbachev repeatedly that the countries of the Warsaw Pact alliance, including the GDR, were on the brink of collapse. Yet Gorbachev went about business as usual. “There was no reaction. Absolutely none.”³³

²⁷ Sarotte, 1989, 36.

²⁸ Kohl, *Erinnerungen*, 961. Cf. Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of the East German Regime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 223–24, 235–36.

²⁹ Savranskaya, Blanton, Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces*, 522–23. See also: Director of Intelligence, CIA, “Moscow’s 1989 Agenda for US-Soviet Relations,” February 1989, in NSA, a substantial document that does not mention Eastern Europe at all, at least in those parts that were not excised.

³⁰ Shultz, in HIA, HIGFC, Box 3, 33. Shultz also felt that he had been “misled, lied to, and cut out” by the intelligence community, whose analysis, he concluded “was distorted by strong views about policy.” Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 864.

³¹ In a landmark volume edited by Arnold L. Horelick, intended to assess the impact of Gorbachev on world affairs, there is nary a word about Eastern Europe or the German Question. Arnold L. Horelick, ed., *U.S.-Soviet Relations: The Next Phase* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

³² Douglas J. MacEachin defends the CIA’s record in *CIA Assessments of the Soviet Union: The Record Versus the Charges: An Intelligence Monograph*, (Washington: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1996), 99–101. Elsewhere, he notes how difficult it was to present “pure” intelligence to Congress, in particular, where political agendas trumped attempts at objectivity. See “Dialogue: The Musgrove Conference, May 1–3, 1998,” in Savranskaya, Blanton, Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces*, 99–214, 110–11.

³³ Falin, in HIA, HIGFC, Box 1, 29.

The inability of American leaders to grasp the extent of the crisis and the immediacy of its effects, while claiming leadership of a superpower, is reflected in Robert Gates's *From the Shadows*. As a career intelligence analyst and former member of the Bush White House staff as Deputy National Security Advisor in 1989–91, Gates writes, quite appropriately, that the US government, including the CIA, “had no idea” in the beginning of 1989 “that the tidal wave of history was about to break upon us.” “I know of *no one* in or out of government who predicted early in 1989 [at the beginning of the Bush administration] that before the next presidential election Eastern Europe would be free, Germany unified, in NATO, and the Soviet Union an artifact of history.”³⁴ One might add that they didn't even come close. Yet Gates also talks about how Condoleezza Rice, Robert Blackwill, and Robert Zoellick—all in the Bush National Security Council—provided “intellectual and political imagination guiding administration policy toward Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.” This, combined with

Bush's experience and instincts, Baker's political savvy and negotiating skill, Scowcroft's strategic and historical perspective, and my [Gates's] management of interagency process, would allow the United States to play a sure-footed leadership role in the liberation of Eastern Europe, the unification of Germany, and the final collapse of the Soviet Union.³⁵

But then the image of sure-footed leadership disappears again when he writes: “From 1989 to 1991, we shot the rapids of history, and without a life jacket.”³⁶

As a result of this ambivalence and the inherent conservatism in the Bush administration's style and approach, Bush, Baker, Scowcroft and others developed a hands-off, wait-and-see attitude toward Eastern Europe. This very much reflected the policy of the Reagan White House, which showed, wrote Robert Blackwill, “no willingness [...] to challenge in any fundamental way the status quo in Eastern Europe.”³⁷ In a May 1988 meeting between Secretary of State George Shultz and Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze during the Reagan-Gorbachev Moscow summit, Shultz said all one needed to say about regional issues was: “Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Central America, Ethiopia, Cambodia and South Africa.”³⁸

Even more than the Reagan administration, the Bush White House team emphasized the central watchword of “stability,” though this could not be publicly underlined, since, as Baker made clear to Shevardnadze in private discussions, “being for stability sounded too much like being for the status quo.”³⁹ At the same

³⁴ Gates, *From the Shadows*, 449.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 460–61.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 483.

³⁷ Robert D. Blackwill, “European Influences and Constraints on U. S. Policy toward the Soviet Union,” in Arnold Horelick, ed., *U.S.-Soviet Relations: The Next Phase* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 127–52, 144.

³⁸ The White House: Memorandum of Conversation, “Second Shultz-Shevardnadze Meeting,” 31 May 1988, in NSA, 1988 Moscow Summit Files.

³⁹ Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 140.

time, the dramatic arms-control initiatives and bilateral approaches to Gorbachev of Reagan and Shultz—the supposed genuine, conservative anti-communists—were abandoned by the Bush administration. Shultz worried for good reason that the “real momentum” in Soviet-US relations that President Reagan and he had handed over to the Bush administration might be “squandered.”⁴⁰ As Robert Hutchings, former member of the Bush National Security Council points out, there was “no such thing as a ‘Reagan-Bush’ foreign policy. Before 1989 there was Reagan; afterwards there was Bush.” He adds that an entirely new team was brought into the White House, “representing foreign policy approaches fundamentally at odds with those of the Reagan administration.”⁴¹ Indeed, the new White House initiated a lengthy series of policy reviews, the “pause,” which frustrated Gorbachev, the European allies, and East European progressives. These policy reviews produced little more than “mush,” wrote Baker, leading one to doubt whether they simply reflected a lack of direction about how to proceed.⁴²

During the winter and spring of 1989, the White House grew increasingly anxious about the growing criticism in the American press about its passivity and lack of engagement. Meanwhile, splits within the administration—with some, like National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, urging caution about Gorbachev’s motives and others, like Secretary of State James Baker, ready to be somewhat more exploratory—also made the White House seem inert. “There are those who want to declare the Cold War ended,” stated Cheney at the time of his appointment. “But I believe caution is in order [...] We must guard against gambling our nation’s security on what may be a temporary aberration in the behavior of our foremost adversary.”⁴³

In the end, it is not at all clear that the Bush White House took some initiatives in the great events of 1989 because they had come up with policy objectives that they sought to implement or because they were worried that their superpower status would be diminished by their perceived inactivity. They were particularly worried that Gorbachev had seized the initiative in Europe and appeared to gain strikingly in popularity at the expense of President Bush and the United States.⁴⁴ In the zero-sum game logic of superpower relations Gorbachev’s burgeoning popularity in Europe meant that the president simply had to become more active and engaged on the continent. When US secretary of state James Baker came to Moscow in mid-May 1989, the Soviets took this as a sign that the Bush administration was at long last ready to renew Ronald Reagan’s efforts to move “beyond containment.”⁴⁵ But even then, the message was off-key, according to

⁴⁰ Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1138.

⁴¹ Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 6.

⁴² Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 68. Scowcroft also expressed his “disappointment” with the strategic review process. Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 53.

⁴³ Cited in Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 425.

⁴⁴ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 43.

⁴⁵ Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 818.

Gorbachev. The Americans expressed worries that a stronger Soviet Union might be more ready to project military power, “which would cause concern in the United States.”⁴⁶

A number of younger scholars of 1989—Gregory F. Domber and Mary Elise Sarotte among them—suggest that the problem with the Bush administration was that it did not care all that much about the Poles or the East Germans and instead focused primarily on its attachment to NATO and the preservation of the status quo.⁴⁷ Neither taking Gorbachev’s renunciation of the use of force in Eastern Europe at his word nor understanding the depth of Gorbachev’s need for Western economic and political support, the Bush White House worried inordinately about a 1956 scenario that would see the Poles or Hungarians take any US encouragement as a sign to rise against their communist rulers and then expect American protection if the Soviets invaded. Even more they were concerned about a scenario like 1981 in Poland, where communist parties would crush internal opposition using military force and the United States would be left with no options except to protest. Therefore, in the first free election in the socialist bloc, scheduled in Poland for 4 June 1989, the American embassy in Warsaw worried excessively about a total victory for Solidarity.

A more modest—but nevertheless solid—victory for Solidarity would enhance prospects for a stable process of democratization. Total victory or something close to it, including possible rejection of the national list, will threaten a sharp defensive reaction from the regime. The position of the leading party reformers would be endangered. Sharper, and even possibly military responses cannot be ruled out.⁴⁸

At the least, the embassy sensed that “the historical force of a vast and powerful current is about to transform Poland’s topography forever.”

President Bush’s much-heralded and long-awaited visit to Poland in July 1989 did not leave much of an impression of US determination to support democratization and the rule of law. Even worse, the president did not deliver on implicit promises of large-scale US economic aid in reward for the concrete measures of reform that had been undertaken. The Poles had high hopes for a grand Marshall Plan-style initiative on the part of the United States; both Solidarity chief Lech Wałęsa and party leader and premier Mięczyśław Rakowski mentioned the figure of 10 billion dollars as critical to the survival of the country’s economy. But Bush was only able to commit to the Polish Sejm a paltry 15 million dollars for environmental initiatives, while promising to ask Congress for an additional 100 million dollars for other purposes.⁴⁹ There would be some debt relief and support for IMF loans. To add insult to injury for the Poles, the

⁴⁶ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 501.

⁴⁷ Domber, “Rumblings in Eastern Europe,” 58–61; Sarotte, *1989*.

⁴⁸ Amembassy Warsaw to Secstate, 2 June 1989, in NSA, “Solidarity,” Doc. 2, (E 23).

⁴⁹ Even Scowcroft admits that the financial package was “embarrassingly meager.” Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 114.

president's chief of staff, John Sununu, former governor of New Hampshire, touched a raw nerve when he talked about the dangers of providing generous credits; otherwise the Poles would behave like "a kid in a candy shop."⁵⁰

President Bush spent more of his time in Warsaw with General Jaruzelski than expected, trying to convince him to run for president as a way to insure stability in the country. In fact, Jaruzelski later noted that he decided to run in good measure because he felt he had the backing of the Americans.⁵¹ The US embassy was deeply fearful that "if Jaruzelski is not elected president, there is a genuine danger of civil war ending, in most scenarios, with a reluctant but brutal Soviet intervention."⁵² Like Gorbachev, Bush was not interested in "poking a stick into an anthill" in Eastern Europe.⁵³ In Bush's words, "We followed closely but quietly, we could accomplish more by saying less."⁵⁴ No wonder his reception from the Polish people was less triumphant than he and Ambassador Davis had hoped.⁵⁵ His inadvertent statement in Poland that the Soviets might think about pulling their troops out of Poland led to such nervousness on Gorbachev's part that the American president (and his ambassador in Moscow) immediately tried to reassure Gorbachev that he really didn't mean it.⁵⁶

Bush's visit to Budapest had a similar character, though his welcome there was much more enthusiastic than in Poland. Once again, he demonstrated his clear preference for the reformed communists in power than the dissidents who had struggled to bring about change. At a reception at Ambassador Mark Palmer's residence, he expressed concern when told by Imre Pozsgay that the communists would surely lose power in a free election. Palmer, who had cultivated good relations with dissidents and reform communists, was frustrated, he said, by "the extreme caution" of the president and secretary of state. "Bush and Baker kept cautioning these people [...] in my living room [...] not to go too far too fast." Bush instructed the dissidents that the communist government "was moving in the right direction. Your country is taking things one step at a time. Surely that is prudent." When Bush was introduced to Janos Kis, the quintessential Central European intellectual and dissident, who enjoyed enormous respect throughout the region, he later told his aides: "These really aren't the right

⁵⁰ Dalos, *Der Vorhang geht auf*, 57.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵² Amembassy Warsaw to Secstate, 23 June 1989, in NSA, "Solidarity," Doc. 4, (E378).

⁵³ Conversation Gorbachev with Kohl, 12 June 1989, in Savranskaya, Blanton, Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces*, 463–67, 465.

⁵⁴ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 135.

⁵⁵ In a 27 June 1989 cable intended for the White House, entitled "Poland Looks to President Bush," Ambassador Davis writes: "[The president's visit] may even be one of those events where the convergence of historic trends, of national interests and of decisive individuals can bring about a moment in time which changes the direction of history." NSA, "Solidarity," Doc. 5, (E384).

⁵⁶ Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire*, 198–99.

guys to be running the place. At least not yet. They're just not ready." He much preferred the rule of the communists in the government.⁵⁷

Bush's reaction to the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 left a similar impression of disinterest and lack of understanding. The Bush and Scowcroft memoirs protest, perhaps too much, that the administration's restraint regarding the Wall, Poland, and Eastern Europe as a whole was a matter of being "prudent"—their favorite word.⁵⁸ Bush had promised Gorbachev that he would not "dance on the wall," and he most assuredly did not. James Baker notes that the President did not want it to appear that "we were sticking our thumb in their eye."⁵⁹ At the same time, it is not at all clear that he understood the important implications of the fall of the Wall for Germany and Europe. Perhaps more importantly, there seemed to be no recognition in his remarks of the role of the East German citizenry in bringing about one of the biggest moments in the collapse of communism. In mid-October, as the Leipzig demonstrations attracted the attention of the world, the Bush administration talked about "normalization" and "reconciliation," but not "unification" or "reunification," which were deemed too incendiary.⁶⁰ "What was wrong with a divided Germany," noted Brent Scowcroft, "as long as the situation was stable?"⁶¹ What the Bush administration defended as prudence, its critics call a lack of imagination.

Helmut Kohl understood the dangers and promises of the East German situation perfectly. Once East German citizens began to pour out of the country to the West through Hungary in summer and crowded into West German embassies in Prague and Warsaw in September to get entry into the Federal Republic, Kohl quickly concluded that Bonn's long-time policies of propping up the East German regime in exchange for concessions on human rights and visitations had proven bankrupt. The East German regime was unwilling to engage in genuine reforms, and the Federal Republic could not afford to support a situation in which the huge number of GDR citizens who threatened to leave would end up in the FRG. With the demonstrations in Leipzig in the early fall and the breaching of the Wall in November, Kohl began to move decisively toward unification.

Kohl readily acknowledges his friendship for and the backing of George H. W. Bush during the crisis. In his memoirs, he repeatedly gives credit to Bush for supporting him and his policies, particularly in light of the furious opposition to German developments by British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, the elusive

⁵⁷ Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989*, 304–5.

⁵⁸ See for example, Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 40, 55. Baker is critical of American ambassador Vernon Walters's forthright approach to unification as undermining the White House's efforts for a "prudent evolution." Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 165. Hutchings writes that "the very prudence" with which the president made his policies "cause many to miss just how ambitious the central vision was." Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 38.

⁵⁹ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 164.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 162–63.

⁶¹ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 188–89.

reticence of French president François Mitterrand, and the last-minute attempts by Gorbachev, especially in the winter of 1989, to put a full stop to Kohl's plans.⁶² Melvyn Leffler writes that "their [Kohl's and Bush's] friendship grew as they labored to transform the landscape of Europe."⁶³ It is also true, as Timothy Garton Ash points out, that the Germans needed the Americans, with Bush in the lead, to broker the "specific guarantees about united Germany's military and security position which enable Gorbachev to accept NATO membership."⁶⁴ Still, the leadership on the German Question during this period is unambiguous: Kohl managed the unification of Germany.

On the question of who was leading whom as a consequence of the fall of the Wall, there are telling passages in the Bush and Scowcroft memoirs complaining about the fact the Kohl did not check out his famous "Ten Points" of 28 November 1989 with the White House before actually presenting them to the Bundestag.⁶⁵ (Kohl also did not pass them by his coalition partner, Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher.) Kohl claims in his memoirs that he did indeed alert the president to what he was doing. He writes:

I informed Bush of my intention to summarize the ideas of the West German government about the German Question in a kind of catalog [*Katalog*]. The American president assured me once again that the United States supported the demand of the Germans for self-determination and unity.⁶⁶

Kohl notes that he decided not to share the Ten Points with his allies (or coalition partners) because inevitably the impact of the document would get watered down with their input. The allies would all receive it from their ambassadors in Bonn the morning of the presentation to the Bundestag, with one exception: "The American president, whom I had already earlier notified of the initiative, would receive the Ten Points personally."⁶⁷ However, the Germans intentionally sent the White House the Ten Points in the German original. By the time they could translate the document, Horst Teltschik noted in a recent talk, it would be too late for any potential intervention.⁶⁸ "We achieved our goal," he wrote in his diary for 29 November 1989: "the Bundeskanzler had taken over the opinion leadership [*Meinungsführerschaft*] of the German Question."⁶⁹

⁶² Kohl, *Erinnerungen*, 871–72.

⁶³ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 439.

⁶⁴ Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Random House, 1993), 349.

⁶⁵ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 194–95. At least in his memoirs, Scowcroft expresses more annoyance with Kohl's move than does Bush.

⁶⁶ Kohl, *Erinnerungen*, 989.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 996.

⁶⁸ Horst Teltschik, Plenary Session, Eyewitnesses, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Conference "The Revolutions of 1989," 2 October 2009.

⁶⁹ Teltschik, *329 Tage*, 54–58.

The Soviets

Bush's restraint about Eastern Europe and the GDR and the changes going on there reflected those of Gorbachev, though the latter was clearly more agitated by and more garrulous regarding the remarkable events that were capturing the world's attention. Gorbachev's position and that of the Soviet Union was also more threatened by these changes than were Bush and the Americans, though it is not certain that he understood that fact. Almost from the very beginning, Gorbachev's attitude about the Soviets' empire in Eastern Europe was complicated and churlish. Often one gets the feeling from the internal conversations about developments in the region that he simply didn't want to hear about them. To start with, "new thinking" in foreign policy was mostly about arms control, relations with the United States, and, increasingly over time, relations with Europe, meaning Western Europe. His ideas about a "Common European Home" were meant to appeal to the West Europeans in particular. Even in his conversations with the Americans and Europeans, the East Europeans were barely mentioned.⁷⁰

Gorbachev wanted the East European communists to follow his lead, engage in their own form of perestroika, and gain the allegiance of their societies themselves. The respective communist parties and the peoples of the "fraternal" countries had the right and duty to determine their own "political course" and "model of development."⁷¹ Still, sometimes, he passed on more than gentle hints to his East European "friends" to abandon their old ways. Gorbachev worried that the presence of Soviet troops in parts of Eastern Europe might provoke anti-Soviet attacks of one sort or another which might force action on his part.⁷² But under no circumstances should the East European communist parties expect the Soviet Union to intervene on their behalf against their own people. Their job was to get their own houses in order by engaging in extensive reforms. Eventually, in Gorbachev's words, "a synthesis of democracy and socialism" would take place.⁷³ But he was not sanguine about the willingness of the East European party bosses to follow his lead: "at first they did not take our intentions seriously but treated them with polite curiosity and even condescending irony." Once they realized he was indeed serious, Gorbachev writes, "they began to make clear their refusal to accept perestroika, especially when it came to democratization and glasnost."⁷⁴

⁷⁰ See Palazchenko, in HIA, HIGFC, Box 2, 23.

⁷¹ Vadim Medvedev, as cited in Svetlana Savranskaya, "In the Name of Europe: Soviet Withdrawal from Eastern Europe," in Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, and Leopoldo Nuti, eds., *Europe and the End of the Cold War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 36–48, 38.

⁷² Kramer, "The Collapse (Part 1)," 189–92.

⁷³ Gorbachev and Mlynar, *Conversations with Gorbachev*, 84.

⁷⁴ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 483.

Gorbachev was pleased with the fact that Jaruzelski had taken decisive leadership in the matter of reform in Poland, but he was annoyed with the rest of the East European party bosses.⁷⁵ In a 29 January 1987 Politburo plenum, Gorbachev stated:

We notice the distancing from us of Honecker, Kadar, and Zhivkov. With Honecker we have differences of views [...] Our self-administration he equates with the Yugoslavs [...] He is dissatisfied with how we have proceeded with Sakharov [the lifting of his banishment in December 1986]. We have to stick firmly to the principle: every ruling communist party must answer for that which goes on in their country. Kadar and Honecker don't believe that the process [of perestroika] can no longer be reversed. Husák spreads compliments but comes out against everything new at home. Zhivkov talks about campaignism [*kampaneishchine*]: Your Khrushchev with his reforms started the 1956 [uprising] in Hungary. And now, supposedly, Gorbachev is destabilizing the socialist community.⁷⁶

During his visit to Prague in April 1987, Gorbachev was thrilled as always by the wildly enthusiastic reception of the crowds, who looked to him as their savior. "The atmosphere reminded me of May 1945," he told his Politburo comrades on 16 April: "They shouted at me: 'stay here for just one year.'" But he also noted grimly that the Czechs showed no enthusiasm at all for their communist leader, Gustáv Husák. At the end of the visit, he told Husák: "We will not carry out our policy of perestroika at your cost. But you should not count on living at our cost."⁷⁷ By December, Husák was out of office.

Despite his lack of enthusiasm for most of the East European leaders, Gorbachev consistently refused to become involved their internal politics. He was utterly disdainful of Romanian communist leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, but chose silence when Romanian dissident communists asked for his support in removing the Romanian dictator. "We will not react [to this request]," Gorbachev told the Soviet ambassador, who had conveyed the appeal. "We do not mix into their affairs."⁷⁸ Contrary to the worries of the US government, Gorbachev took a benign view of the revolutionary changes that enveloped Poland in the summer of 1989. Ambassador Jack Matlock correctly assessed Moscow's attitude toward the Polish events. They would have liked the communist party to remain a major player in Polish politics, Matlock wrote.

But in the final analysis, although Solidarity may be a bitter pill to swallow, our best guess is that the Soviets will do so, if it comes to that, after much gagging and gulping. Their essential interests in Poland will be satisfied by any regime, Solidarity-led or not, that can promote domestic stability and avoid anti-Soviet outbursts.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Gorbachev writes: "He [Jaruzelski] and I had formed a very close and, I would say, amicable relationship." Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 485.

⁷⁶ Chernyaev, Veber, Medvedev, eds., *V Politbyuro*, 141.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁷⁸ Medvedev, in HIA, HIGFC, Box 2, 35.

⁷⁹ NSA, "Solidarity."

Mark Kramer concludes that the Soviets were more activist than that: “Rather than trying to save the PZPR’s [the Polish party’s] ‘leading role’ in Polish society, the Soviet Union actively facilitated the demise of Communist rule in Poland.”⁸⁰

During his fateful visit to East Berlin on 6–7 October for the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the birth of the East German state, which he had tried very hard to avoid attending, Gorbachev again felt moved by the crowds. As they filed past him, even with Honecker at his side they cried out “Gorbachev, you are our hope!” “Perestroika! Gorbachev! Help us!” and “Gorby, Gorby!”⁸¹ Honecker was a hopeless case, Gorbachev was convinced, but he would not himself intervene to remove him from his position. Still, he understood, as Egon Krenz had told Falin in Berlin, that if the SED did not remove “Erich,” “the matter would quickly come to a storming of the Wall.”⁸² After Gorbachev’s signals in Berlin that change would not be unwelcome in Moscow and some 70,000 people engaged in the first of a series of huge demonstrations in Leipzig on 9 October, Krenz and his allies in the SED leadership removed Honecker from power.⁸³

Mirroring his superpower rivals in Washington, who focused on Soviet-American relations and arms control, Gorbachev did not seem to know or care much about what happened in the countries of Eastern Europe as long as they remained in the Warsaw Pact and NATO was confined to Western Europe. His closest confidant on policy matters, Anatolii Chernyaev, writes that: “He [Gorbachev] simply poorly understood the national situation in the allied states. Our policy towards them [...] was completely un-thought through. [...] We did not have a policy.”⁸⁴

The Central Committee plenum transcripts for 1989 and 1990, not to mention the diaries and available Soviet foreign ministry materials from that period, barely mention Eastern Europe and the events that were dramatically transforming the region. Instead, the Soviet party leaders, Gorbachev at their head, seemed fully occupied with the economy, the fate of perestroika, keeping control of domestic political opponents, and, eventually, the upheaval in the Caucasus and Baltic republics. Chernyaev notes that no more than 5–6 percent of their discussions were about foreign policy, and these were dominated primarily by arms control and ending the Cold War, not Eastern Europe.⁸⁵ Gorbachev’s chief of staff,

⁸⁰ Kramer, “The Collapse (Part 1),” 200.

⁸¹ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 524.

⁸² Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 806.

⁸³ See A. James McAdams, *Germany Divided: From the Wall to Unification* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 197.

⁸⁴ Chernyaev, in HIA, HIGFC, Box 1, 65–66.

⁸⁵ Chernyaev in Savranskaya, Blanton, Zubok, eds., *Masterpieces*, 146. “Foreign policy, even the most dramatic moments, even in the period of German unification, took up only five or six percent of the considerations of Gorbachev and the Politburo, of their time and their nerves.”

Valerii Boldin, goes so far as to claim that: “The major changes in the countries of the former Socialist commonwealth were never discussed in any forums whatsoever, large or small.”⁸⁶ Meanwhile, in the Foreign Ministry, those officials who were in charge of Eastern Europe and the “fraternal” socialist countries were considered less interesting and less successful than the experts on US and West European affairs.⁸⁷ Even the foreign minister himself was preoccupied with the fate of perestroika. “Shevardnadze’s role and attention,” wrote James Baker, in reference to a November 1989 Paris meeting with the Soviet foreign minister, “are being diverted increasingly to domestic issues.”⁸⁸

Initially, Gorbachev felt that the changes taking place in Eastern Europe could only help the Soviet cause by building internal stability and political consensus in these countries. He also did not think that Soviet security and internal stability would be affected by changes in Eastern Europe. He and his advisors repeatedly noted in internal conversations that the Soviet Union had been responsible in the late 1940s for the transfer of an unworkable Stalinist system to Eastern Europe. Now was the time for that system to be replaced. But even as Hungary, Poland, and eventually the GDR were hit by political crises, Gorbachev was neither willing to intervene by force nor to guide the course of events. The use of force would sink perestroika and encourage the conservatives at home, while bringing an end to good relations with the West. In his important December 1988 speech at the United Nations, Gorbachev assured the world that the Soviet Union would not interfere with the “radical and revolutionary changes that are taking place” and “that force and the threat of force can no longer be, and should not be instruments of foreign policy.”⁸⁹

Even guidance implied responsibility, and he was not willing to take it on. Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl exchanged appropriate folk sayings in German and Russian for the delicate situation in Hungary. Kohl stated, “Let the church remain in the village [...] [meaning] the Hungarians should decide themselves what they want.” Gorbachev responded, “We have a similar proverb: do not go to another monastery with your own charter.”⁹⁰ In early October 1989 Chernyaev noted in his diary: “In a word, as a world phenomenon, socialism is undergoing a complete dismantling. [...] And probably, this is inevitable and good.”⁹¹ By this point, Gorbachev himself says that he had become more of a social democrat than a Soviet

⁸⁶ Boldin, *Ten Years*, 144.

⁸⁷ A. L. Adamishin, in HIA, HIGFC, Box 1, 26.

⁸⁸ Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 141. “It was obvious from his style of operation,” writes Baker later in his memoirs, “that Shevardnadze was preoccupied with domestic matters.” *Ibid.*, 150.

⁸⁹ Gorbachev’s Speech to the UN, 7 December 1988, CNN Cold War Series: Historical Documents, http://isc.temple.edu/hist249/course/Documents/gorbachev_speech_to_UN.htm (accessed 3 July 2013).

⁹⁰ Conversation Gorbachev with Kohl, 12 June 1989, in Savranskaya, Blanton, Zubok, eds., *Mastepieces*, 465.

⁹¹ Chernyaev, *Sovmestnyi iskhod*, 806.

socialist of the old stripe.⁹² Some scholars have suggested that Gorbachev had begun to see the world through the eyes of European statesmen and political leaders.⁹³

As superpower leaders, Bush repeatedly assured Gorbachev that he would not take advantage of the upheavals that were taking place in Eastern Europe one after the other, and Gorbachev assured Bush that he would not intervene militarily or politically, and would allow “history” to take its course. Both appreciated the other’s demonstrations of restraint. Nevertheless, there were still powerful figures on both sides who continued to suspect the motivations of the other. No matter how often the end of the Cold War was pronounced by politicians and pundits in both countries, both sides sometimes continued to operate as if they were the superpowers of old locked in deadly competition. The KGB and CIA produced reports accusing the other, respectively, of trying to take advantage of the new situation for the purpose of undermining the other. As a KGB document from August 1989 put it:

In the conditions of the revolutionary renewal of Soviet society, the spread of democracy and glasnost, the special services of the capitalist countries and the foreign, anti-Soviet centers tied with them [...] are transforming their underground activity against the USSR on a new strategic and tactical platform

with the goal of “forcibly overthrowing Soviet power.”⁹⁴ Adam Ulam wrote nearly forty years ago: “For some time now, the United States and Russia have been struggling not so much against each other as against phantoms, their own fears of what each might become unless it scored points over the other or barred success to the other side.”⁹⁵ This was as true of 1989 as it was earlier in the Cold War.

Gorbachev’s German gambit at the end of 1989, the Soviet idea of exchanging German unification for this country’s neutralization and demilitarization that surfaced periodically in the early postwar history of Soviet-German relations, worried the White House and encouraged the president to reinvigorate his close relationship with Kohl and Bonn. But Gorbachev had more important things on his mind. Already in 1986, he had told his advisors that the Federal Republic was key to the success of perestroika. As its major trading partner in the West and the most likely potential source of foreign capital, investment, and loans, the Soviet Union desperately needed a good relationship with Bonn. By the time the German unification issue became serious during the winter of 1989–90, it had become

⁹² Gorbachev and Mlynar, *Conversations with Gorbachev*, 79.

⁹³ James J. Sheehan, “The Transformation of Europe and the End of the Cold War,” in Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36–68.

⁹⁴ “O sozdanii v KGB SSSR Upravleniya po zashchite sovetskogo konstitutsionnovo stroya,” 4 August 1989, in HIA, fond 89, op. 18, d. 127, l. 1.

⁹⁵ Adam B. Ulam, *The Rivals: America and Russia since World War II* (New York: Viking, 1971), 382.

increasingly clear that Gorbachev was the ruler of an extremely weak, if not failed, state. He urgently needed help. He reached out to the West Germans, hopeful that a close relationship with them would bring important political and, especially, economic gains. During Gorbachev's discussions with Kohl in Bonn in June 1989, the German Chancellor made no bones about the potential economic benefits of Soviet concessions on the German Question. Closer relations were impossible "as long as the division of Germany stands between us. It is the decisive impediment in our relationship."⁹⁶

In the fall of 1989, there was considerable opposition in the ranks of Gorbachev's advisors, and especially among the "Germanist" in the Foreign Ministry and Central Committee, to concessions on the German Question. Although some thought that the unification of Germany was inevitable and felt some sympathy for the Germans' frustrations with the division of their country, most could not admit to themselves that they were "losing Germany," and, as a result could not muster serious policy alternatives for Gorbachev, even if he would have entertained them.⁹⁷ Others, like Falin, did not oppose unification of Germany on principle, but were concerned that "we should 'sell' it at a higher price."⁹⁸ Gorbachev had been able to confine the actual decision-making process to such a narrow group of insiders that even the Politburo did not raise objections to the possibility of unification.⁹⁹ When the Politburo met on 9 November, the day of the breaching of the Wall, there was no discussion about the situation in Germany. Instead Gorbachev and the Soviet leaders were focused on the upheaval in the Baltic republics.¹⁰⁰ Even the Soviet ambassador in East Berlin, Vyacheslav Kochemasov, and the local Soviet intelligence station were poorly informed about the events surrounding the fall of the Wall.¹⁰¹

In the wake of the fall of the Wall, the opposition of Mitterrand and especially of Thatcher to unification was more annoying for Kohl than helpful to Gorbachev. "Twice we have defeated the Germans! And now they are here again!" the "Iron Lady" railed at the Strasbourg meeting of the European Community in December 1989.¹⁰² Gorbachev had the uncomfortable feeling that Thatcher and Mitterrand (and even the Americans) were using him as way to hold up the process of unification and serve as a lightning rod for Bonn's ire. As he stated in a 3 November session of the Politburo: "The West doesn't want the unity of Ger-

⁹⁶ Kohl, *Erinnerungen*, 888–89.

⁹⁷ Adamishin, in HIA, HIGFC, Box 1, 23. See also Chernyaev, Box 1, 54.

⁹⁸ Falin, in HIA, HIGFC, Box 1, 29.

⁹⁹ G. M. Kornienko, in HIA, HIGFC, Box 2, 34. See also Chernyaev, Box 1, 60–61.

¹⁰⁰ William Taubman and Svetlana Savranskaya, "If a Wall Fell in Berlin and Moscow Hardly Noticed, Would it Still Make a Noise?" in Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., *Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 69–95, 70.

¹⁰¹ Angela Stent, *Russia and Germany Reborn: Unification, the Soviet Collapse, and the New Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 107.

¹⁰² Kohl, *Erinnerungen*, 1013.

many, but wants us to deal with it, as a way to bring us into conflict with the FRG, as a way to prevent a deal between the USSR and Germany.”¹⁰³ At the same time, he later admitted, he had no idea at the time what challenges the German Question would pose to Soviet foreign policy.¹⁰⁴

As a result, by the beginning of 1990, despite intense opposition internally and from Mitterrand and especially Thatcher abroad, Gorbachev went so far to endorse the inevitability of German unification, something that even the wildest optimists in the White House about the German Question could not have predicted. Baker and Kohl laid out the conditions under which unification would take place. Neither Shevardnadze nor Gorbachev had much of an argument to make. Oleg Grinevskii, who took part in the February 1990 discussions in Moscow with James Baker, stated: “We had no position [...] no concrete line.” As a result, given the united German-US position, Gorbachev conceded on the question of whether the new and united Germany could retain its ties with NATO.¹⁰⁵

Conclusions

While Thatcher and Mitterrand wanted Gorbachev to stop German unification, Gorbachev wanted them (and Kohl) to restrain the Americans from “interfering” in Eastern Europe, when that was pretty much the last thing on Washington’s mind. In fact, the White House was anxious to keep Gorbachev in power and to maintain the balance in Europe, both of which could be disrupted by any upheaval in Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, the Americans continued to worry that Gorbachev would take advantage of them by scoring points in Europe with arms control initiatives and tempting Kohl into a special relationship. Yet for both superpowers, the status quo was preferable to any changes, because—in some important senses—change challenged the position of the superpowers themselves.

The wait-and-see attitude of the superpowers toward Eastern Europe and the concomitant attachment of both to a static European reality that was changing more quickly and more dynamically than they themselves could absorb gave the East Europeans and the Germans the chance to shape their own destinies in 1989. Shevardnadze’s answer to the Hungarians when they decided in May 1989 to pull down the barriers to East German flight to the West was typical: “This is an affair that concerns Hungary, the GDR, and the FRG.”¹⁰⁷ When Kohl queried Gorbachev about the same issue, the general secretary simply answered: “The

¹⁰³ Dalos, *Der Vorhang geht auf*, 139.

¹⁰⁴ Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 516.

¹⁰⁵ O. A. Grinevskii, in HIA, HIFGC, Box 2, 33. See also Boldin, *Ten Years*, 143.

¹⁰⁶ Dockrill, *The End of the Cold War Era*, 71.

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World*, 235.

Hungarians are a good people.”¹⁰⁸ The Polish communists could make a deal with Solidarity about sharing power at the round table discussions of spring 1989, which was the first step toward the dismantling of communism in Poland, without Soviet interference. East German demonstrators in Leipzig could take to the streets with the confidence, if not assurance that Soviet troops would not interfere with their strivings for control of their own destiny. Helmut Kohl and his deputy Horst Teltschik could take advantage of the upheaval in East Germany and the fall of the Wall to drive the process of unification. Neither the Soviets nor the Americans would stop them. The self-induced paralysis of the superpowers helped Germans in the GDR and the FRG bring an end to the postwar order in Germany. Valentin Falin could have been speaking for both the Kremlin and White House when he noted: “We did not control the events, but the events controlled us.”¹⁰⁹

Of course, Gorbachev and his actions were critical to the outcome of the revolutions of 1989. His determination that his East European “friends” stand on their own feet and take responsibility for their own countries, without being able to count on Soviet backing or even instructions, accelerated the pace of change from 1985 onwards. The very example of perestroika also encouraged East European oppositionists to press forward their demands and took the sails of their communist opponents, who no longer had the backing of Moscow.¹¹⁰ Gorbachev’s repeated renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine—never explicit, but clear enough for all to understand—took away a crucial psychological, as well as real, undergirding for the communist regimes of Eastern Europe.

But the Soviet general secretary seemed no more focused on the German Question than he was on the Polish, where he naively thought Jaruzelski could forge a political alliance with the opposition that would keep Poland in the Warsaw Pact and as a Soviet strategic ally for a long time to come. Gorbachev’s repeated response to the Poles, the Hungarians, the Bulgarians, and the others was that their political development was their business. They needed to deal with their problems and their crises. This answer was particularly inappropriate for the GDR, where there were nearly a half million Soviet troops and their dependents stationed around the country. So much of the Soviet self-image was wrapped up in the victory over Nazi Germany, symbolized by their military presence in the east. But, like so much else, Gorbachev simply did not have an answer to the German Question. Gorbachev did not have a German policy, and those who did, including the Germanists in the Foreign Ministry, and Valentin Falin, head of the Central Committee’s International Department, were routinely shunted aside because of their “conservatism.” As a result, with some twists and turns, Gorbachev was pulled along by Kohl. And Kohl’s vision was based

¹⁰⁸ Adamishin, in HIA, HIGFC, Box 1, 26.

¹⁰⁹ Falin, in HIA, HIGFC, Box 1, 39.

¹¹⁰ Kramer, “The Collapse (Part 1),” 180.

on an instinctive understanding of the East German population, those who sought to leave, those who demonstrated, and those who simply wanted to be done with the socialist experiment forever.

There is good reason for the superpowers to have congratulated themselves about 1989, but the story is mostly about what they did not do rather than what they did. There are also serious questions about what they understood and what they didn't. But in their fascination with each other and their doctrinaire views of their own superpower influence they did not interfere with the revolutions of 1989, something that cannot be said of the European powers and the French Revolution, the Revolutions of 1848, or the Bolshevik Revolution. With the superpowers sitting on their hands, everything worked out reasonably well.