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US STRATEGIC PLANNING IN 1989–90

The generation of 1988

By the end of 1988, a generation of Americans (and Europeans) had grown up absorbing profound lessons from the collective experiences of the World Wars. The lessons were distilled to axioms. And these axioms were reduced to phrases, phrases that every US policymaker of the 1980s knew by heart: “NATO alliance,” “forward defense,” “flexible response.”

As the years went by, most allied leaders also internalized, and even welcomed, their participation in a new kind of confederation, an “Atlantic community.” Transnational links grew between political parties, legislators, and soldiers. The allies became proficient at working within each other’s domestic political systems. German, British, and other European statesmen became especially adept at navigating the complex US political system, savvy to the concerns of congressional committee chairs or big-foot columnists. With all its fraternal quarrels and friendships, this confederation—“the alliance”—became a sort of extension of the American federal union itself. As the years passed, presidents knew and thought about other alliance leaders almost as much, and sometimes even more, than they knew or thought about their fellow political leaders in the United States.¹

In the field, atop the watchtowers in Central Europe, several generations of soldiers, who over the years numbered in the millions, rotated in and out of the same casernes. A son might take up a duty station at the Fulda Gap, serving in the same armored cavalry regiment and manning the same observation post that his father had stood watch from.

Periodically, the sinews of the alliance came under strain. And, against this threat, generations of policymakers also stood watch. All of the men and women who led the US government in 1989 were conditioned to rebutting arguments against forward defense. They regarded such assaults as dangerously naïve isolationism and were ever ready to man the political ramparts to defend the alliance.

These instincts and ingrained concepts have not vanished from American public life, but their salience has receded. They were part of my own professional training, but I was part of the last generation of Americans in public life to be so trained and habituated.

¹ See, e.g., Ernest May, “The American Commitment to Germany, 1949–55,” *Diplomatic History* 13, no. 6 (Fall 1989): 431–60.

In 1989 these assumptions and habits of thought were still fresh, especially for the men and women who directed US foreign policy. The new president in January 1989, George H.W. Bush, had fought in World War II as a navy pilot in the Pacific. On one of his missions his plane was shot down. Bush was lucky to survive; his crewman did not. By 1989, whether as CIA director or as a presidential candidate or as Ronald Reagan's vice president for the past eight years, he had spent the previous twenty years immersed in the process and politics of standing watch.

Bush's key aides also felt they knew firsthand what terms like "forward defense" and "NATO" and "flexible response" meant. His national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, was finishing the United States Military Academy at West Point during World War II and, trained as a pilot, was injured in a crash and spent the rest of his air force career at desk jobs, earning three stars and a prior tour as national security adviser to President Gerald Ford before he returned to that office for President Bush. He had repeatedly worked on the management of nuclear weapons and spent years harmonizing US policies with NATO allies.

Bush's secretary of state, James Baker, had been a lieutenant in the marines during the next war, in Korea. Though his part in forward defense was an assignment in Europe working with comrades from NATO countries, some of his friends from basic training had gone to Korea, and some were killed there.

Bush's secretary of defense, Dick Cheney, had not served in the military. The issues were nonetheless deeply familiar to him, whether from his service as chief of staff to President Ford or his later years as a congressman from Wyoming, when he was the ranking Republican on both the House Intelligence Committee and the Intelligence Subcommittee of the powerful Appropriations Committee.

The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in early 1989 was a navy admiral, William Crowe. Crowe was a chairman more in the old mold, an envoy between the service chiefs and the rest of the government. In the first months of 1989, he would faithfully represent the received views of the army and air force. Crowe's successor, Colin Powell, was the first to grasp fully the independent power of the chairman conferred by the Goldwater-Nichols law of 1986, as *the* military advisor to the President with his own "Joint Staff." Powell had been part of forward defense on both sides of the world: two combat tours in Vietnam, a tour in Korea, and tours manning the frontlines in Germany.

As Bush took office in early 1989, the great question was whether the conflict and positions this group of men and women had known for their entire professional lives had come to an end. The arguments in late 1988 and early 1989 about this were complex. And certain historical accounts have added to the confusion.

What did an "end" of the Cold War in Europe mean?

The historian Mary Sarotte argues that "At the beginning of 1989, the newly installed President Bush intentionally instituted a pause in the rapid dismantling

of Cold War weapons and attitudes.” She portrays the Reagan administration as wanting to drop old assumptions and treat the Cold War as over, but finds that these beliefs were pushed aside by the new Bush team. She quotes a career civil servant who later joined Bush’s National Security Council staff, Robert Hutchings, as saying that ““an entirely new team came in, representing foreign policy approaches fundamentally at odds with those of the Reagan administration.””²

Sarotte quotes Hutchings accurately. But Hutchings, who summarizes this period quite ably in the book being quoted, does not think Bush “instituted a pause.” In fact, Hutchings spends the entire chapter from which the quote was drawn, his chapter on “American Grand Strategy,” making just the opposite point.³ If a conscientious historian like Sarotte can get this wrong, then it is worth taking a closer look not only at the rhetoric, but at what people meant by it and the concrete policies that went with it.

By the end of 1988 Ronald Reagan’s secretary of state, George Shultz, and Reagan’s philosophical comrade-in-arms, British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, believed—and said publicly—that the Cold War was over.⁴ They wanted the US government to declare victory and embrace Mikhail Gorbachev. Thatcher, like Shultz, considered the Cold War over *with the status quo of 1988 in place*. This is an essential point. It linked them with other European statesmen and American experts who believed the conditions of 1988 had ended the Cold War.

There were differences within this group. Some, like Thatcher, felt every aspect of that status quo should be carefully preserved—very much including its foundation in strong Western defenses. Others, like West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, felt that the end of the Cold War already afforded scope for more rapid progress on disarmament. Where people like Thatcher, Shultz, or Genscher could all agree was that if any concrete, new initiatives were needed, they were on subjects like strategic nuclear arms control (the START talks).

Thatcher, for instance, gave little attention to reducing the conventional arms massed in Europe, and had no use at all for schemes that would go from the treaty eliminating intermediate-range nuclear missiles to new talks for reducing the shorter-range nuclear arms deployed in Europe as well. After all, these were the pillars of “forward defense,” of “flexible response,” and of NATO solidarity.

And none of the statesmen who believed the Cold War was over in 1988 were pushing ideas on how to help roll back communism in Eastern Europe. Neither

² Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 22.

³ Robert L. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 6–47. Hutchings was detailed from the National Intelligence Council to the NSC staff early in 1989.

⁴ Don Oberdorfer, “Thatcher: Gorbachev Has Ended Cold War,” *Boston Globe*, 18 November 1988, 7; George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), 1131, 1138.

they, nor their key subordinates, favored any move to reopen the German Question. From their perspective, pressing such issues would only jeopardize the successful ending of the Cold War.

Leaders like Thatcher and Shultz (it is harder to be sure of Reagan's views at the end of 1988) had a plausible theory: The steadfastness in Western defense had proven its worth. Cold War had been replaced by a genuine relaxation of East-West tensions, a real *détente*. This more stable, beneficial status quo should be preserved. Solidarity in forward defense, flexible response, and NATO should, therefore, be stoutly maintained. If Gorbachev wished to reduce Soviet armaments, this was long overdue and good. But it was no reason for the West to abandon its position of strength by following suit.

An alternative view came to the same conclusions about not compromising Western defense, but with a somewhat different rationale. Both the new secretary of defense, Dick Cheney, and Scowcroft's deputy, the veteran CIA Soviet-watcher Bob Gates, gave more weight to the possibility that Gorbachev was trying to revitalize the Soviet empire, as Yuri Andropov, the late Soviet leader and former KGB chief, had hoped he would (Andropov had been a key patron in Gorbachev's rise to high office). Both Cheney and Gates, like some analysts of the Soviet Union at the time, also stressed the need to hedge against the imminent possibility that Gorbachev might be overthrown. Scowcroft's views were more reserved than those of Cheney and Gates, but at that moment were not very much different.⁵

Where was Bush on all this? He told his advisers, "We should dream big dreams." Bush himself is sometimes portrayed as a cautious, prudent "realist." A less schematic but more accurate assessment would find something different.

Bush was an intelligent and almost peripatetically restless man, a competitive baseball player in his younger days now reduced to tennis, golf, fishing, horse-shoes, or anything else that came to hand. Unlike Reagan, who was a self-taught intellectual who loved thinking and writing about political ideas, Bush was more action-oriented than reflective. His was a politics of personal chemistry, driven very strongly by emotion, filtered through a deeply ingrained screen of courtesy and obligation. Words like "honor" cut deeply for him. Though he was conversant on issues, Bush's deeper judgments about basic direction tended to be instinctive,

⁵ On Scowcroft, see George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 12–13. These Americans were not the only ones to think Gorbachev was trying to revitalize Soviet power, not reduce it. Such hopes had animated some of Gorbachev's key supporters within the Soviet military, like his security adviser, Sergei Akhromeyev. A leaner, reconfigured Soviet military—refocused and out of Afghanistan—made sense to some of these marshals in the mid-to-late 1980s. Gorbachev made choices that confronted the Soviet military more and more directly. This was becoming clearer only as Bush took office, when Gorbachev's landmark speech before the United Nations in December 1988 (which some analogized to Khrushchev's force cuts speech in 1960) was followed by other new steps, such as those in conventional arms control proposals I will discuss in the following, and the April 1989 purge from the Party's Central Committee of key military figures like former general staff chief Nikolai Ogarkov.

guided by his sense of duty or trust. His conversation and his correspondence (he was a frequent and faithful note and letter writer) are full of expressions like—explaining how he and Gorbachev came to be able to “go around the world on issues” —“I thought I had a feel for his heartbeat.”⁶

In his first weeks in office, as in his transition, Bush still wanted “to dream big dreams.” This turned into a belief that the status quo of 1988 was to be changed, not preserved. His “big dreams” would be a wave of further changes.

To make the picture still more complicated, advisers like Scowcroft were willing to countenance radical changes in Western defense posture. Scowcroft’s main concern at this time was to preserve nuclear deterrence. Scowcroft himself did not think the Cold War was over. That was a statement “you can only say once,” he would explain. And “the Reagan Administration’s willingness to declare an end to the Cold War, without taking into consideration what that would require, disturbed me.” Instead he thought “we should change our sights from managing the Cold War on the ground in Europe and stabilizing the situation to look beyond, to resolution of the basic issues.”⁷

The desire to get at “the basic issues” preoccupied Scowcroft’s staff. In early 1989, that group included advisers like former ambassador Robert Blackwill, the Stanford Sovietologist Condoleezza Rice, and a relatively junior foreign service officer detailed to the White House (me). Hutchings, who also joined the staff, accurately recalls that the policies “departed sharply from the Reagan administration, particularly in rebuilding support for nuclear deterrence and radically revising Soviet policy away from a narrow focus on arms control, toward a much more ambitious political agenda.”⁸

This included arms control, as Hutchings rightly points out: “Above all, it meant shifting the prevailing logic away from nuclear arms control for its own sake and focusing on the massive conventional imbalance in Europe.” The shift in focus to the conventional military dispositions was also very much a political agenda. The conventional arms talks with twenty-three participating states were “seen in political as much as military terms as a vehicle for relaxing Soviet pressure on its Warsaw Pact allies and so facilitating political liberalization in Europe.”⁹ After all, as 1989 began, Europe remained divided. More than a million

⁶ The Bush quote is from a transition memo, Ross to Baker, “Thoughts on the ‘Grand Design,’” 16 December 1988. Unless otherwise noted, citations to any government documents from 1989–90 are from my review of the originals in the early 1990s for Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, rev. ed. 1997). Bush explains his commitment to personal diplomacy in Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 60–61; his comment on Gorbachev is on page 10.

⁷ Scowcroft’s comment on “say only once” is from my interview with him, Washington, DC, June 1991; “disturbed me” from Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 12.

⁸ Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 27. See also his description of the conventional wisdom for the US-Soviet agenda as of the end of 1988, detailed on 34–35.

⁹ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 27; Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 28.

soldiers confronted each other at its center. In February 1989 a young man trying to flee into West Berlin, Chris Gueffroy, was shot dead by East German border guards at close range at the Berlin Wall.

Scowcroft's old boss and mentor, Henry Kissinger, had proposed a US-Soviet understanding on *mutual* restraint in Eastern Europe, to "give the Soviets security guarantees (widely defined) while permitting the peoples of Eastern Europe to choose their own political future" and "conceive a drastic reduction of all outside forces in Europe—including those of the US—that might revolutionize present concepts of security." Kissinger discussed these ideas in Moscow and proposed creating a "back-channel" to work them some more. Beyond the process concerns that Kissinger's role might usurp his own, which bothered Baker, the substance was also objectionable to Baker. Though the language Kissinger had developed seemed reasonable, the framework of arriving at a US-Soviet agreement about the fate of Eastern Europe struck some others, like Hutchings, as a "Yalta II."¹⁰

In March 1989 Scowcroft's staff, looking for ways to promote even faster political change in Central and Eastern Europe, put forward a proposal, which Scowcroft endorsed to Bush, that the goal of US policy in Europe "should be to overcome the division of the continent through acceptance of common democratic values." As an alternative to Gorbachev's concept of a "Common European Home" divided into different rooms by social systems, alliance structures, and historical realities, the United States would propose a vision for a "commonwealth of free nations."¹¹

This faction, especially Blackwill and I, also wanted Bush to put German unification back on the international agenda. In the same March memo to Bush, Scowcroft signed off on language that said the United States should do more to highlight possibilities for movement on German unification, to "send a clear signal to the Germans that we are ready to do more if the political climate allows it." This point of view clashed with the senior European advisors then still in office at the State Department. The assistant secretary for Europe, Rozanne Ridgway, had been a key adviser to Shultz and was a former ambassador to East Germany. Like many others deeply experienced in the *Ostpolitik* arguments of the 1970s and 1980s, she was uneasy, even scornful, about ideas to roll back the Cold War status

¹⁰ On the Kissinger episode, see James A. Baker III with Thomas DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 40–41; Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 27; Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 35–37. The "Yalta II" slur is itself a revealing misuse of history, reflecting the widely held belief that Yalta was a superpower deal to divide Europe. Though some writers allege such a deal was made, it was not. Indeed some other writers (including some eminent historians) wish that such a deal *had* been made, either then or later.

¹¹ Scowcroft to Bush, "The NATO Summit," 20 March 1989. On 26 March, Bush noted to Scowcroft that he had "read this with interest!" Bush marked up the memo, underscoring and checking the paragraph about the priority to be attached to policy toward Germany. Bush eventually used the "commonwealth of free nations" phrase in his Mainz speech of 31 May and elaborated on it in a speech on US relations with Europe delivered in Leiden on 17 July. He used a similar phrase, simplified as a "commonwealth of freedom" in another speech delivered to the Czech Federal Assembly in Prague on 17 November 1990.

quo. But Bush himself, as would later become even clearer, regarded himself (in his words) as “less of a Europeanist, not dominated by history.”¹²

At the top of the State Department, Secretary Baker and his chief aides, notably Robert Zoellick and Dennis Ross (who acted as Baker’s key adviser on Soviet policy) devoted their first weeks to two goals. The first was rebuilding a bipartisan coalition at home. This was accomplished through painstaking work to defuse the Central America issue, a signature feature of the “Reagan Doctrine” but a lightning rod for partisan argument. Their second initial goal was to strengthen alliance relationships with Europe.¹³

Meanwhile, as Baker and his people refocused hard on European issues and US-Soviet relations in the early spring of 1989 and encountered more formal policy reviews that had produced “mush,” they helped spur on a different approach, driven by the intense schedule of speeches and trips that the White House now planned in order to articulate the administration’s policies, especially toward Europe and the USSR. Baker regarded the arguments about Gorbachev’s prospects as “mainly academic theology,” with good and bad arguments on all sides.

In his memoir, Baker adds a point that is totally characteristic of him. *Real* strategy is about what you *do*. “What mattered to me were what actions we could take in the face of these two different possibilities [for Gorbachev’s future], in order to maximize our diplomatic gains while minimizing risks.” Baker was tuned into the dynamic opportunities in Eastern Europe, pressing the point with Bush in a meeting on 8 March. At high-level meetings in late March and early April, discussions began concerning new approaches toward Europe.¹⁴

An agenda for Europe, an arms control move for Gorbachev

March and April 1989 were a catalytic period for the new Bush presidency. Only some of this had to do with the international situation. Much of the churn-

¹² See Scowcroft to Bush, “The NATO Summit,” 20 March 1989; see also the description of inter-agency differences in Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 25–26. The Bush comment is from my interview with him in Houston, January 1995.

¹³ The Central America work is often ignored in the standard accounts. Turning the page on this issue strengthened the domestic foundation for Baker’s policy work everywhere. On this hot subject, Baker put a Democrat (Bernard Aronson) in charge and painstakingly negotiated a deal that preserved some humanitarian aid to the Nicaraguan resistance against the Soviet and Cuban-backed Sandinista government, but got this with a full-court press to implement a regionally negotiated deal for elections in Nicaragua (the Esquipulas accord). See Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 47–60. He won significant points with Moscow by working with the Soviets to make this process work; some of the notable irritants in US-Soviet relations during 1989 arose from Soviet or Cuban arms deliveries to Nicaragua. The gratifying result was the defeat of the Sandinista government led by Daniel Ortega when elections were finally held in February 1990.

¹⁴ For “mush,” see Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 67–70; for more on the high-level deliberations beginning at the end of March, see Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 42–45.

ing was really about the new president deciding what he and his administration should become.

Every new administration, especially a new White House team, carries with it some of the zeal, camaraderie, and confidence from a victorious campaign. The outward energy and confidence naturally masks some measure of very private insecurity. Officials ask themselves, in effect, "Can I/we really handle this?" In foreign policy, Gorbachev was the toast of the world. Bush had not yet been defined as a president or as a statesman.

But Bush had ambitious instincts. He also had effective advisers and a competent staff. His chief national security aides, Scowcroft and Gates, hit the ground running. On European policy, Blackwill—who had spent formative years as a young diplomat working on Kissinger's staff—was a one-man think tank. Blackwill could generate ideas and then map out a choreography of trips, speeches, and other actions to carry them forward.

For Bush, and for his administration, the varying views on Gorbachev had coalesced on one core issue: how the Soviet leader would handle the prospect of change in Eastern Europe. By the end of 1988, Gorbachev had signaled unprecedented tolerance, an end to the Brezhnev Doctrine. During the transition, Bush had told his team that, at that moment in history, he thought Eastern Europe was the most exciting place in the world.

In his first policy address on Eastern Europe, in April 1989, Bush promised that "Help from the West will come in concert with liberalization." Arms, Bush added in a conscious echo of Czech dissident Vaclav Havel, "are a symptom, not a source of tension. The true source of tension is the imposed and unnatural division of Europe." The West, he said, "can now be bold in proposing a vision of the European future."¹⁵

In the same April 1989 address, Bush made it clear that Soviet tolerance of East European reforms was *the* litmus test for US attitudes toward Gorbachev. Quoting Timothy Garton Ash, Hutchings observes that: "At this crucial juncture, the United States linked the development of its relationship with the Soviet Union to Soviet conduct in East-Central Europe." Hutchings adds his own view that this linkage may have been "the single most important contribution the United States made to the events of 1989." Bush pressed this point in a delicate enough way

¹⁵ Bush's transition comment is recounted by Zoellick in an interview with me, Washington, DC, January 1995. For the speech, see Bush address, Hamtramck, Michigan, 17 April 1989, *Public Papers of the Presidents: George Bush*, bk 1, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=16935> (accessed on 25 Nov. 2012). Raymond Garthoff asserted that the timing of Bush's speech on the day Solidarity was legalized was a coincidence. Raymond Garthoff, *The Great Transition* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1994), 606. It was not. The roundtable talks began in February 1989. Bush's speech on this topic was planned in advance and timed to follow the Warsaw announcement of the roundtable outcome. See Baker's notes from his meeting with Bush on Eastern Europe on 8 March. Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 67; see also Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 39–40.

to avoid embarrassing Gorbachev or undermining him at home: “[T]he very prudence with which the president pursued these aims caused many to miss just how ambitious the central vision was.”¹⁶

In early 1989 Gorbachev’s professed tolerance was tested, concretely, in the Polish roundtable agreement to hold limited elections. Gorbachev had already opted to allow a version of highly limited but still significant elections in the Soviet Union itself, for the Congress of People’s Deputies, and so he let the Polish plans go forward for elections that would be held in the summer. Gorbachev’s endorsement of political reform evoked a strong positive response from Bush and Baker, especially after Baker returned home from an important, encouraging trip to Moscow in early May 1989.

On the Soviet Union, Bush signed a national security directive that bypassed and largely ignored the just-concluded formal review. The new directive said that containment had been a successful strategy, but was not an end in itself. On 12 May, Bush announced that US policy toward the Soviet Union should go “beyond containment” and instead foster “the integration of the Soviet Union into the international system.” He tested Gorbachev’s new openness by reviving Eisenhower’s Open Skies plan that would open both American and Soviet airspace to the surveillance of military sites. Bush also made it clear through Baker (in the secretary’s visit to Moscow in early May) that he would bet on Gorbachev’s success. And—with Bush’s support—Baker stamped out an effort by Cheney to offer a seemingly different view. In October Baker would step even harder on what he perceived to be an analogous effort by Gates to voice a distinct view on US-Soviet policy.¹⁷

¹⁶ Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 38.

¹⁷ Bush address, College Station, Texas, 12 May 1989, in *Public Papers*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=17022> (accessed 22 Apr. 2013). The national security directive was crafted, as I remember it, mainly by Scowcroft, Gates, Blackwill and Rice at the White House, with some help from Ross at the State Department. On the conceptual move represented by Bush’s 12 May speech, see Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 40–41. For a somewhat less generous appraisal, see Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 26–27. On Baker versus Cheney and Gates, see Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 70, 75, 156–58. Gates offers his own very useful perspective on these developments in *From the Shadows* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 427–71. The Open Skies initiative led to negotiations that began in Ottawa in February 1990 (a meeting best known for the side discussions on Germany) and later produced a 1992 treaty. The treaty now has 35 signatories. It entered into force in 2002, when Russia and the United States began conducting their first overflights. No territory could be placed off limits. At the time it was announced, this initiative was widely derided, even by key insiders like Scowcroft, as just a rehash of an old idea that had been no more than a rhetorical gesture even in 1955. For others, including the NSC staffers (Blackwill and I) who had developed this idea, the idea had been important and ahead of its time in 1955 and remained highly relevant in 1989. Though it is widely believed that the advent of satellites makes military openness from aerial surveillance moot, satellite surveillance has many limitations, including coverage and flexibility. On the significance of the original 1955 proposal, see the interesting summary from one of its originators, Walt Rostow, *Concept and Controversy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 137–71.

Bush then delivered another address aimed at Western Europe. This time, the attainment of a single European market and prospects of creating a single European currency were the issues in the foreground. At that time, officials spoke of realizing such plans in 1992, and this date was the shorthand term researchers will find in the documents that discuss these aspirations. In the Reagan years, the United States had been ambivalent about whether this huge step forward in European integration was a good thing.

Bush acknowledged the ambivalence, which was understandable since “the postwar order that began in 1945 is transforming into something very different.” But, in language that was heard loud and clear on the other side of the Atlantic, and which Bush repeated a few days later when he met with French president François Mitterrand, the American president declared that, whatever others may say, “this administration is of one mind. We believe a strong, united Europe means a strong America.”¹⁸ One reason the US government supported this momentum, Bush explained, was because he understood that European integration was a powerful magnetic force “drawing Eastern Europe closer toward the commonwealth of free nations.” The term “commonwealth of free nations” was one Bush would use in a couple of other speeches, linked to a powerful phrase Bush used in early June, that the United States sought a “Europe whole and free.”

The same speech that declared US support for further European integration also emphasized the closeness of the United States with Germany, as “partners in leadership.” That new partnership was tested in May 1989, as secret envoys crisscrossed the Atlantic trying to work through an arcane but essential ingredient in the new approach.

In the spring of 1989, Gorbachev was not looking for economic help from the United States. What he sought were reciprocal moves, especially on conventional arms control. Such moves could help him make the case at home that military confrontation was a thing of the past, whereby he could reallocate major resources and political authority away from the military-industrial complex that so dominated the Soviet Union’s system of central economic planning. This was a pivotal issue for him at home and for the general direction of Soviet posture in Europe. At its core were issues of spending on the conventional, general purpose forces.

Military reformers in the USSR were not terribly troubled about the treaties limiting categories of nuclear arms. In both superpowers, nuclear weapons made up only a fraction of defense spending. In the Soviet Union as in the United States, though for different reasons, a large majority of defense spending was driven by conventional force requirements that required millions of men and tens of thou-

¹⁸ Bush address, Boston, Massachusetts, 21 May 1989, in *Public Papers*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=17046> (accessed 22 Apr. 2013). On this address, see also Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 41–42, who notes the relationship of Bush’s approach to what Baker would later outline as a “New Atlanticism.”

sands of weapon systems. To take on *these* “requirements” meant a leader had to take on the core of the military establishment—whether in the Soviet Union or in the United States.

Meanwhile NATO was on track to consider a long-overdue modernization of its short-range nuclear forces, essential to the established notions of flexible response. If overwhelmed by the more numerous armies of the Soviet Union and its allies, NATO relied on short-range nuclear forces to display a credible “flexible response” capability to escalate to nuclear combat in Europe. In the spring of 1989, the alliance dispute over these plans bubbled into public view, as the British and Americans—leading the faction supporting modernization—encountered public West German calls not only to derail any update, but also to start negotiations to eliminate these nuclear systems altogether.

Confronting this sharp quarrel over short-range nuclear forces, Baker and Scowcroft arrived at a key insight. They fused two problems into one solution. They judged that a way to help Gorbachev, while also defusing this quarrel over the short-range nuclear force, was to push very hard for conventional arms control. Reductions in conventional forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact from the Atlantic to the Urals were to be negotiated in a forum called CFE (for Conventional armed Forces in Europe). The work on nuclear arms reductions would go on, but the more urgent priority was to help the momentum of Gorbachev’s reforms and ease the Soviet military withdrawal from Europe.

The core idea was to put off *both* modernizing and negotiating about the short-range nuclear forces until the CFE treaty was done. These nuclear issues could be put aside, so the argument went, because the whole future of flexible response would look very different if the underlying imbalance of conventional forces could finally be addressed. Beliefs about such an imbalance of ground forces had fundamentally influenced every US and allied assessment of European security since 1943. If the conventional imbalance could be erased, the requirements for maintaining nuclear deterrence at the theater-level, in Europe, might then shrink too.

But that strategy meant the CFE treaty had to be concluded very soon. For this reason, a quick outcome would be promised. To make such a promise credible, the United States would agree to Gorbachev’s framework for the talks. The Soviets and their allies had offered to go along with reductions to common ceilings in tanks, artillery, and armored fighting vehicles. But Moscow insisted that the NATO side reciprocate. The Soviets insisted on Western agreement to similar reductions in two categories of weaponry where the West had at least a qualitative edge: combat aircraft and helicopters. This Soviet proposal was quite controversial in Western capitals.

Bush decided he would agree to include the proposed ceilings on aircraft and helicopters, as the Soviets had proposed. He would lead the NATO alliance to agree to offer such a deal. Further, Bush resolved he would throw in a readiness to reduce US troop numbers in Europe (by about 50,000) as the Soviets drew

down their forces, to reach an equal ceiling that would be about 15 percent below the existing US number.¹⁹

Months earlier Baker and Scowcroft had started out from a very different place, with very different ideas on how to advance bold ideas for adapting forward defense. Now the package synthesizing a new move on conventional arms control became an approach they both liked. It was put together in great secrecy by Scowcroft's staff.²⁰

The administration was split. Cheney and his Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, Admiral Crowe, argued strongly against making these concessions. Crowe was especially outspoken, describing these as just "PR" moves that would put "forward defense" at risk.

President Bush sided with Baker and Scowcroft. Baker's deputy, Lawrence Eagleburger, and Scowcroft's deputy, Gates, were secretly dispatched to Europe to work on the issue with key allies, bracketed by presidential calls and more envoys exchanged with the Germans. Led by Thatcher, the British made no secret of their concerns about these moves, but they ultimately went along as Baker hammered out an agreed document at the NATO summit codifying the deal agreed to by sixteen allied presidents and prime ministers: a nuclear stall, linked to the new push to reduce and cap conventional forces.²¹

In effect, Bush was judging that, by showing that NATO and European institutions were supple enough to handle constructive change, the US could manage the risks from redefining the requirements for forward defense and flexible re-

¹⁹ To set the scene: "In late 1988 in many NATO capitals (Ankara, London, Rome, and Washington, for example) NATO forces were considered too thin to maintain a credible conventional deterrent. Thus NATO could not afford to reduce any of its own forces even if facing a leaner [Warsaw Pact] force." Jane M.O. Sharp, *Striving for Military Stability in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2005), 37 (for details on the aircraft and helicopters issue, see also 22, 52). On the insight about linking the conventional and nuclear arms control problems, in which the Dutch foreign minister and West German defense minister also played important roles, see Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 82–83, 89–91; Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 45–46, 71–73. For background on CFE issues as of the spring of 1989, see Barry Blechman, William Durch, and Kevin O'Prey, *Regaining the High Ground* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Jonathan Dean, "Conventional Talks: A Good First Round," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 45, no. 8 (October 1989): 26–32, 26, 28; Richard Falkenrath, *Shaping Europe's Military Order* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 29–48.

²⁰ One reason the NSC staff role was so significant on these CFE issues was the backgrounds of the people involved. In 1985–86 Blackwill had been the ambassador to the long-running predecessor negotiation, known as MBFR, that had been limited to central Europe. I had worked for Blackwill on the MBFR delegation and stayed, in 1987, to be the political adviser to the new CFE ambassador, Stephen Ledogar, during the new negotiation's formative first year.

²¹ Looking back after the treaty was concluded in 1990, it seemed evident that "by May 1989 the essential structural elements of the CFE treaty had been defined." Falkenrath, *Shaping Europe's Military Order*, 54. On the May 1989 debates in the US government, which were concentrated around the third week of that month, there are various illustrative but fragmentary accounts in the published literature. I have some notes from the time. See also Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 93–94; Don Oberdorfer, *The Turn* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1991), 347–51.

sponse. As far as he or his aides could see, the outcome turned out to be everything they had wanted.

Another point should be clear: Bush, Baker, and Scowcroft thought, and often said, that their maneuvers were designed to preserve US engagement overseas. “Forward defense” was, for them, a kind of synonym for the old post-1950 axiom of overseas engagement as the way to protect the United States. They thought that taking the initiative to adapt forward defense to a transformed international system was the wisest way to preserve this engagement.

What about Gorbachev and his risky and even more important agenda for change in Europe? The NATO moves helped him during the pivotal summer of 1989 to make the necessary arguments at home and with communist allies in Eastern Europe.²² In a sense, both Bush and Gorbachev were now moving, in parallel and reciprocally, to tell their respective military leaders that they had to change the force posture they had followed for generations. All this, plus Baker’s personal diplomacy, also helped ease Gorbachev’s concerns about Bush’s calls for a “Europe whole and free” when Bush visited Germany in late May and traveled to Poland and Hungary in July 1989.

Yet it was still Europeans who would have the initiative to decide how Europe would change. The older *Ostpolitik* consensus accepted the Cold War status quo as the basis for rapprochement. In early 1989, West German foreign minister Genscher affirmed that understanding. Gorbachev elaborated on it with an approach that would preserve the fundamental status quo while allowing for political reform within those structures. He called for a “Common European Home” that would accept differing social systems and preserve the existing alliance systems.

So there was a notable contrast when, in a speech in Mainz at the end of May 1989, Bush articulated the goal of a “Europe whole and free” (using a phrase coined by a speechwriter on Ross’s staff at the State Department). This goal plainly regarded the Cold War status quo as questionable: “The Cold War began with the division of Europe. It can only end when Europe is whole.” The Bush White House also planned to call attention to the German Question and the possibility of German unity. Separately, Baker and Zoellick had come to the same conclusion. Baker pressed the point directly with Bush, who was receptive. In late May 1989, Bush had told an interviewer that he would “love to see” Germany reunified. His explanation was from the heart: “Anybody who looks back over his shoulder and then looks at the present and sees a country ripped asunder by division, a people ripped asunder by political division, should say: ‘If you can get reunification on a proper basis, fine.’”²³

²² As Bush saw it at the time, meeting with Italian prime minister Ciriaco De Mita, “Some say we’re cold warriors, that we don’t want Gorbachev to succeed. I’ve made clear that’s not the case.” Personal notes from the meeting, 27 May 1989.

²³ Bush address, Mainz, Germany, 31 May 1989, in *Public Papers*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=17085&st=&st1=> (accessed 22 Apr. 2013). The “Europe whole and free”

Bush saw this German Question as a gut issue of trust. He had been deeply impressed when, as vice president, he had visited Germany during the height of the enormous protests over the NATO decision to deploy US intermediate-range missiles, the great alliance issue of the day. The then new chancellor, Helmut Kohl, had taken time to get to know his American visitor. Much later, Bush would still vividly recall demonstrators slinging rocks at his car without much security reaction (“Our Secret Service would have shot them!”) and sitting in a garage with Kohl waiting for a route to clear. This, it struck him, was a society willing to pay the price for free speech. Though he would readily acknowledge that, “I can’t claim to have understood everything that would happen in Europe from Day One,” Bush had come to a conclusion about West Germany and the Germans—and their leader: “At some point you should let a guy up.”²⁴

On Scowcroft’s staff, Blackwill and Zelikow wanted Bush to call out the unification issue in his Mainz speech and they put language to do this into the draft. Yet Scowcroft was uneasy about getting too far ahead of where the Germans themselves were on this issue. He worried about prematurely disturbing the *Ostpolitik* consensus. Finalizing the Mainz draft for Bush, Scowcroft muted the draft language to say only: “We seek self-determination for all of Germany and all of Eastern Europe.”²⁵

But there was no doubt about Bush’s overall message. He was offering a clear objective of overcoming the division of Europe, one that contrasted sharply with the message Gorbachev offered a week later in Strasbourg. When Reagan had eloquently called on Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall, it was a speech-writer’s phrase and there had been no serious follow-up. In a memoir of more than a thousand pages, Shultz does not even mention Reagan’s Berlin remarks.

Bush returned to Reagan’s theme. He hit it hard. “[T]here cannot be a common European home until all within it are free to move from room to room. [...] Let Berlin be next.”²⁶

phrase was in the initial State Department draft for the speech prepared by Harvey Sicherman, who had also worked for Shultz. See generally Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 28–29, 31–32. On Baker and Zoellick’s views, see Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 159 (publishing notes from Baker’s meeting with Bush on 17 May). The May 1989 Bush interview was with *Washington Times* editor Arnaud de Borchgrave. De Borchgrave, “Bush ‘Would Love’ Reunited Germany,” *Washington Times*, 16 May 1989, A-1.

²⁴ My interview with Bush, Houston, January 1995. In his memoir, Bush added additional anecdotes about a 1983 visit to the inter-German border. Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 182–83.

²⁵ Earlier in May, Blackwill had sent Bush a memo pushing the unification issue again. Scowcroft sat on it for months, not sending it forward to Bush until August. Bush finally read it on 9 September. Ten days later, he found another chance to speak publicly about his support for unification. Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 380 n. 70.

²⁶ See Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 45–46. Hutchings concludes that: “At the beginning of 1989, there had been three competing visions of Europe’s future—Gorbachev’s, Bush’s, and Genscher’s. By the time of the May 1989 NATO summit [...] there was one.” After quoting the

Bush's initiatives on arms control, adopted at a meeting of NATO heads of state in May 1989, and his stance toward Europe were extremely well received. The NATO summit success, followed immediately by the strikingly positive reception Bush received in Germany, seems to have bewildered the new president a bit. Bush felt he had to remind reporters that, "I'm the same guy I was four days ago."²⁷

A period of transition: June–November 1989

Beyond the issues of the moment, which were soon forgotten outside of the professional community concerned with them, this early success had an effect on the president's team, affecting the way they thought of themselves. It solidified habits of thought and habits of action.

Historians sometimes do not pay enough attention to the inner rhythm, routines, and ways of doing things that mark leadership groups in all large institutions. Something is therefore often lost in describing their doings because the inhabitants of these little worlds are acutely aware of these characteristics. In the case of the Bush administration, the successes of the spring of 1989 cemented several ways of doing business, some in the realm of high policy and some more mundane. Among these were:

- the basic policy directions on the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, NATO, and Germany;
- the readiness to consider bold moves (that might override Defense Department preferences);
- the habit of especially trusting coordination with the West Germans (especially the Chancellery);
- a comfort and confidence in managing complex coalition diplomacy;
- the decision-making style relying on an informal set of principles and an entrepreneurial role for the top aides; and
- a synergy between Baker and Scowcroft in the way they helped Bush.

Perhaps most important was the way this episode, and the subsequent trips to Poland and Hungary, built up Bush's confidence in himself and his staff, his reliance on personal outreach to fellow leaders, and his trust in his own instincts.²⁸

NATO summit agreement on the common goal, Hutchings adds: "With that, the United States had reversed the logic of the international agenda and offered a Western vision of Europe's future that helped expose the limitations of Gorbachev's 'common European home' even as it sought to extend the potential of Soviet 'new thinking.'" *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁷ On the "enthusiastic welcome" for Bush's initiatives from both the Bonn government and the opposition Social Democratic Party, see Dennis Bark and David Gress, *A History of West Germany*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 575–77. For the Bush quote, see Oberdorfer, *The Turn*, 351.

²⁸ Bush remarked on the significance of the 1989 NATO summit for his presidency in 1993 discussions with Condoleezza Rice as we were working on our book. For illustrative comments on the

For Eastern Europe, the US stance was to encourage self-determination and to intervene by promising support for countries that made a free choice about their destiny. That was Bush's offer in his April speech about Eastern Europe. The United States did not want to intervene in a way that unduly alarmed the Soviets or encouraged a coup against Gorbachev. Yet it also did not want to do anything that would prop up the existing communist governments. Between April and August, the United States scrambled to assemble modestly useful but mainly symbolic gestures of encouragement to go with the euphoria that accompanied Bush's visits to Warsaw and Budapest.

In August 1989 Poland put a non-communist-led coalition government in place for the first time since 1948, under Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Now Bush's promise of support faced a sterner test. If communist governments chose to transform, the United States had promised to help. The Poles looked to see if the United States would keep that promise. The battle was over economic support to help Poland in particular, but also Hungary (and later others) make the transition to a post-communist society. The most acute needs were for help in making their currencies convertible, access to credit for fiscal support and foreign exchange, and getting relief from the huge foreign debts the communist governments had barely been able to service.

From the start, even in April, the White House had encountered sharp resistance to contemplating large-scale assistance to these countries from both the Treasury Department and the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Having made control of the federal deficit a major part of the domestic political agenda and already facing large costs from cleaning up the savings and loan crisis of the late 1980s, the OMB could not find the money without cutting something else.

The Treasury Department's concern was different. Thanks in part to the hard money policies that cured endemic inflation in the developed countries, debt crises in developing countries had become a critical recurring problem since a near-default by Mexico in 1982. Having run for years from alarm to alarm, the US government had just fashioned (in March 1989) another major approach, named the "Brady plan" for Bush's Treasury secretary. It promised significant debt forgiveness (usually around a third of the debt) and rescheduling of other debts, securitized in US Treasury bonds ("Brady bonds") that were then bought by international institutions. All this was in exchange for domestic market-oriented reform, including restraints on public sector spending. The Brady plan was working (and continued to work, eventually getting agreements from eighteen

contrast in process between the "witches' brew of intrigue" in the Reagan era, where "suspicion and mutual distrust was utterly out of control" and Bush's (and others') belief that the president had attained a process that worked "the way it was supposed to," see Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 31; Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 26–27 (for the quoted language), 30–33.

countries).²⁹ But it was not a good fit for socialist countries seeking debt relief. Bush and Brady understandably wanted to maintain the integrity of their global approach.

The policy challenge was novel. Though suggestive, analogies to the Marshall Plan and to reform plans in East Asia (as, for example, South Korea) were not terribly useful. More useful was the experience already accumulated in coping with developing country debt crises during the 1980s, since Western experts were developing a paradigm for thinking about the reform of state economies. But the new cases in Eastern Europe, led by Poland, presented this challenge in an extreme form.

Poland broke through this policy logjam by presenting a plain choice to the West. The non-communist government developed (aided by Western advisers) a credible program for economic transition. Lacking any coherent alternative, it pioneered the development of a policy approach known, with good cause, as “shock therapy.” It involved an immediate transition to a convertible currency, with the prompt elimination of price controls and nearly balanced public budgets.

In exchange, the new Polish government asked (in September 1989) for help from outside governments in several forms: a billion dollar stabilization fund to sustain a convertible currency, credit lines from the IMF and the World Bank, suspension of debt servicing, and a program of debt relief that would write-down and reschedule loans without damage to Poland’s future access to credit markets. Poland also would need specific technical help and some targeted foreign money in working through structural adjustments.

The West, led by the United States, delivered on its part of the compact. As the Polish government adopted the internal plans by the end of 1989, the Stabilization Fund was created (with contributions from seventeen countries, 20 percent from the United States), the international financial institutions were playing their part, and the desired process of debt restructuring was underway. The United States helped organize new institutions, the G-24 and a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, to provide more varied, longer-term support. The subsequent transition in Poland’s political economy was difficult, with very high inflation and great turmoil. But it was successful—at least measured against the original objectives of the Poles who led the program.³⁰

²⁹ See Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 49, 113–14. For positive contemporary assessments of the Brady plan, see, e.g., William Cline, *International Debt Reexamined* (Washington: Institute for International Economics, 1995); and Riordan Roett, “The Debt Crisis and Economic Development in Latin America,” in Jonathan Hartlyn, Lars Schoultz, and Augusto Varas, eds., *The United States and Latin America in the 1990s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 131–51.

³⁰ A good appraisal is Simon Johnson and Marzena Kowalska, “Poland: The Political Economy of Shock Therapy,” in Stephan Haggard and Steven Webb, eds., *Voting for Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, for the World Bank, 1994), 185–235, complemented by the brief material in Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 138–40; and Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*,

The next formative period for development of a Bush administration approach on Germany, and policy toward the Soviet Union, came in the autumn of 1989, after the onset of the successive East German refugee crises in Hungary, then Czechoslovakia. As these crises reverberated back into East Germany itself, sparking large domestic demonstrations, forward-looking officials in all the major capitals began speculating about Germany's future.

Beginning in August 1989, the West German government led by Kohl began turning away from the spirit of *Ostpolitik* and instead, as the weeks passed, began actively undermining the East German regime. It did this by linking West German promises of aid with calls that the GDR must permit more political freedom.³¹

Beginning in September, Bush again announced his openness to German unification. "I think there has been a dramatic change in post-World War II Germany. And so, I don't fear it [...]. There is in some quarters a feeling—well, a reunified Germany would be detrimental to the peace of Europe, of Western Europe, some way; and I don't accept that at all, simply don't."³² In October, as Kohl's pressure on the East Germans was being widely criticized, Kohl reached out to Bush for help. Though Kohl only asked for Bush to find a way to say publicly that Western solidarity was the key to continued change in the East, Bush called in the top *New York Times* reporter and gave him his front-page lead: "I don't share the concern that some European countries have about a reunified Germany."³³

At this point, opinion within his administration was still somewhat unsettled. Baker was leaning toward a fulsome endorsement, encouraged by Zoellick and Ross and by the new leadership of the State Department's European bureau (Raymond Seitz and James Dobbins). But there were other views within the State Department. The National Security Council staff was also split. Blackwill and I had been pressing to support moves toward unification since March. But Scowcroft, as he himself recounts, "was skeptical about the wisdom of pursuing German reunification and, in that sense, was probably closer to the [former] State

72–76. Allusions to Marshall Plan analogies were common in 1989; Lech Wałęsa urged aid on this scale in his address to a joint session of Congress in late 1989. But much of this rhetoric was based on poor analogies to a Marshall Plan program that was (and is) not very widely understood and, as in Wałęsa's case, there was no underlying proposal. The Mazowiecki government was working the plan that had been developed under the leadership of its economics chief, Leszek Balcerowicz. Among the most influential of the Western economic advisers to the Polish reformers in 1989 and 1990 were Jeffrey Sachs and David Lipton. In addition to their substantive expertise, these experts and a few others played a vital bridging role between the Poles, the US government, and the international institutions. Thus some of the important strategic planning by the governments occurred in this nongovernmental space.

³¹ See Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 63–81; Sarotte, *1989*, 28–33.

³² Quoted in Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 81. The statement was made on 18 September.

³³ The *New York Times* story, by R.W. "Johnny" Apple, was published on 25 October. For context, see Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 81, 94, 398–99 notes 94 and 98.

position than that of my own staff.” For Scowcroft, “what was wrong with a divided Germany as long as the situation was stable?”³⁴

Bush’s October statement settled the issue within his administration. The conflicting views among his advisers had an interesting effect. It freed Bush to feel he could just go ahead and vent his personal preferences. He had not been looking to force the issue. Indeed, he later wrote, “[i]f the NSC or State Department had argued it was a bad idea, I certainly would have been receptive. I was not about to impose my own view on this highly controversial matter.” But the advice Bush had been getting was alternately encouraging or, at worst, conflicting. So he felt able to follow “a comfort level with it [leaning forward on German unification] that others did not yet have, just as I was more comfortable with trying to do more in terms of arms control with the Soviet Union than, say, was the Defense Department.” In these circumstances Bush could “probably set a different tone for the Administration on the issue than it might otherwise have had.”³⁵

A period of rapid maneuver: November 1989–November 1990

On 9–10 November the Berlin Wall opened through an unplanned administrative snafu by the newly formed “reform” communist government of the GDR. The popular ferment in East Germany bubbled over and swept away that government, and, by the end of the year, every other remaining Warsaw Pact government in Eastern Europe. An intense period of diplomatic negotiations followed, on which there are now several reliable accounts.³⁶

Though the Bush administration, like other involved governments, had not anticipated the immediacy and tempo of what followed, its strategic planning for this period of tumultuous change was substantially in place before 9 November.

³⁴ For details on the internal administration discussions about unification in September and October, which included the development of a suggestive draft national security directive (useful more for the thinking that went into it than for the product), see Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 93–95, and especially 396–99 notes 90 and 93. For Scowcroft’s quotes, Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 188–89.

³⁵ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 188. Blackwill, joined by Hutchings, actually wavered about fomenting German unification for a short time, later in December 1989. At that particular moment they were worried about the mischief the Soviet government might make at a German peace conference and they asked Scowcroft to consider ways to slow down the process. This time it was Scowcroft’s turn to press the cause of going forward with unification. He knew Bush had already settled the issue. By January 1990 Blackwill was back to flooring the gas pedal. See Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 154–55, 159–60.

³⁶ Two excellent recent works are Sarotte, *1989*; and Frederic Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification* (Providence: Berghahn, 2009). For a broad overview of how the domestic German factors interacted with the international situation, Sarotte is good. See also the thoughtful review essay by Noel Cary, “Farewell without Tears’: Diplomats, Dissidents, and the Demise of East Germany,” *Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 3 (September 2001): 617–51.

Both in style and substance, the team worked through the whirl of issues along the lines laid out earlier in 1989. Rather than provide a lengthy recapitulation, I offer this list of key policy elements:

- The United States proceeded to facilitate the transition of East European states toward political independence and internal transformation.
- The United States strongly encouraged Gorbachev to restrain from using force, even when the issue became whether Moscow would hold together all the components of the Soviet Union itself. For those choices, the fulcrum turned out to be Soviet policy toward Lithuania—especially during May 1990 and January 1991.
- In November and December 1989, the United States joined Kohl in pushing ahead with unification as the goal, with the unified Germany embedded firmly both in NATO and in the European Community.
- In early 1990, the United States joined Kohl in choosing to push German unification on the fastest possible timetable. This was done in order to gather the hay before the expected storm (the metaphor used by Kohl); in order to retain the initiative and keep the diplomacy of opponents off balance; and in order to build up the plausibility of a choice for unity on Western terms within the East German electorate (looking to their March 1990 election). This policy preferred the rapid absorption of the GDR into the FRG, rather than opt for the lengthy and painstaking construction of a new kind of German republic.
- To reciprocate Soviet moves, but also to put a floor under planned cuts, the United States enlarged its plans to cut forces in Europe and remove more than a third of the US forces that had been stationed in Europe when 1989 began.
- In February 1990 the United States firmed up first its own, and then the allied, position on just how a unified Germany would remain part of NATO—intact and fully integrated into NATO’s military structure, with a special military status for eastern Germany.
- Also in February, the powers developed a process, the Two Plus Four, for negotiating the international aspects of German unification. The United States then led the way in choreographing how that process would work, allowing internal unification to rush ahead and subcontracting certain tasks—like the vital security negotiations and treatment of German troop limits—to the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) process, which itself was moving toward agreement at a linked and astonishingly fast pace, given the enormity of the contemplated cuts in armed forces across all of Europe.
- In the spring and summer of 1990, the United States led a program to preserve NATO and extend its appeal by redefining the alliance approach to forward defense and flexible response. Also, NATO would receive ambassadors from all the former Warsaw Pact countries, thus laying the groundwork for an enlarged vision of the alliance. All this culminated in another NATO summit

triumph for Bush, this one in July 1990.

- In late 1989, and again in the spring of 1990, the United States followed and welcomed moves, led by France and Germany, to complete the process of European monetary union and develop an agenda for European political union.
- In the spring and summer of 1990, the United States watched moves, led by Germany, to provide significant concessionary loans to the Soviet Union. These German loans were extended on a moderate scale in May 1990 and then the loans to the Soviets were made on a very large scale in September.

All these moves culminated in a set of three major international agreements (not counting the European Union moves). In September 1990, the two German states and the former four occupying powers signed the Final Settlement for Germany that was both the long-deferred peace treaty of World War II and a peace treaty for the Cold War.

In November 1990, all the states of NATO and the Warsaw Pact signed the CFE treaty. This erased the conventional military imbalance that had been a seemingly permanent feature of Europe's political landscape since 1944. The treaty led to the withdrawal and destruction of vast amounts of military equipment, and introduced a control regime with thousands of on-site inspections of bases across Europe.

Also in November 1990, all European states signed the Charter of Paris. They agreed on basic principles that would govern political and economic life, including provisions for the conduct of free elections.

As foreseen in 1989, the elimination of the older conventional military imbalance did transform the environment for considering the future of nuclear arms in Europe. With CFE being implemented, hoping to avoid another laborious arms control negotiation, in September 1991 Bush took the lead. He moved unilaterally to withdraw almost all US nuclear forces from Europe. Gorbachev promptly followed suit.

Evolution, revolution, or something in between?

Reviewing the options available to the United States as a strategic goal in 1990, Sarotte observes that the United States consistently chose what she calls a “prefab” approach, relying on existing institutions. The notion of building on familiar, seemingly reassuring institutions is basically right. Bush and his team had not only developed a strong set of beliefs; they also felt comfortable with wielding known institutional settings for action. So when change became even more rapid, they felt prepared.

But the designs were not, in fact, prefabricated for the fall of communism. There was some innovation, especially for Eastern Europe. Even the established ideas and institutions had to be adapted and extended in various ways that excit-

ed occasional controversies within the US government and with close allies. In all of this work, Bush and his advisers were experimenting with ingredients they thought they understood. But they could not just think of themselves. They had to work, wanted to work, with ingredients their partners understood and would find comforting.

Fidelity to the alliance and “forward defense” were at least as important, and reassuring, to their European colleagues. In some accounts, the tone is one of Americans pressing the importance of NATO or the need for a continued American presence. It is perfectly true that the Americans felt this. In December 1989, speaking to European leaders, Bush solemnly pledged to keep US troops in Europe as long as their presence was desired and, he stated as bluntly as he could: “The United States will remain a European power.”³⁷ The statement was released. His advisers who drafted this language wondered how Europeans and Americans would react to such a frank assertion. Yet there was no noticeable reaction at all, least of all from Europe. Most European leaders found reassurance in the same verities.

The “prefab” appearance of the 1990 settlements can make the strategic plans of the time seem conservative. Yet in the winter of 1989–90, the US approach on German unification and the associated issues hardly seemed to be conservative, in the sense of conserving a status quo. Nor was the US government following the conventional wisdom of leading commentators. Its position was more radical than almost any of the published ideas suggested by observers on either left or right, including such notable figures as Henry Kissinger or George Kennan.³⁸ Recalling one episode where Bush pushed through further US troop cuts over the objections of the rest of the government, Scowcroft remembered that Bush’s “approach could hardly have been further from his public image of caution.”³⁹

By aiming so directly at the victory of its known and preferred concepts and institutions, the Bush administration deliberately courted high short-term risk in the hope of greatly reducing risk for the long haul. In one note to Scowcroft, Rice mused openly that if the proposed course was followed, “and this is a hunch,” she “would spend a lot of time in church praying that I was right.”⁴⁰ No new experimentation with how to create a healthy German republic. No new experimentation with how to keep Europe safe. If that meant a near-term confrontation with the Soviet Union, then so be it. And having a clear design put the burden on others to offer an alternative that was at least as plausible.

³⁷ “Outline of Remarks, NATO Headquarters,” 4 December 1989, in *Public Papers*, http://bush-library.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=1297&year=1989&month=12 (accessed 23 Apr. 2013).

³⁸ See, for example, the catalog of opinions in Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 407 note 45. Note also the catalog of expert opinion at the time reviewed in William Wohlforth, “How Did the Experts Do?,” in Melvyn Leffler and Jeffrey Legro, eds., *In Uncertain Times: American Foreign Policy After the Berlin Wall and 9/11* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 163–78.

³⁹ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 208.

⁴⁰ Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified*, 160.

In the period after the Berlin Wall fell, the US government faced a dilemma akin to that of a ship's captain in the age of sail. The ship is sailing toward a harbor. Ominous storm clouds gather and the seas get rough. The channel into the harbor is narrow, with rocks on each side. Navigating it would be hazardous even on a fair day. The alternative is to put out to sea, to ride out the storm or seek some other harbor. Seeing the reassuring lights of a safe harbor he trusted, Bush chose to shoot through the channel.

Aftermath

Just as the European issues were coming together so well, on the evening of 1 August 1990, Bush was resting some aching muscles after relaxing in his usual hyperactive style, whacking too many golf balls on a practice range. That is when he learned that Iraq had just sent its tanks to overrun its practically unarmed neighbor, Kuwait. The president described his first reflection on what was at stake in this way:

I was keenly aware that this would be the first post-Cold War test of the [UN] Security Council in crisis. I knew what had happened in the 1930s when a weak and leaderless League of Nations had failed to stand up to Japanese, Italian, and German aggression. The result was to encourage the ambitions of those regimes. The UN had been set up to correct the failings of the League, but the Cold War caused stalemate in the Security Council. Now, however our improving relations with Moscow and our satisfactory ones with China offered the possibility that we could get their cooperation for forging international unity to oppose Iraq.⁴¹

The next morning, having worked all night on immediate actions, Scowcroft was “frankly appalled” when many of the President’s advisers (Baker was in Asia) did not seem to grasp the situation. “There was a huge gap between those who saw what was happening as the major crisis of our time and those who treated it as the crisis *du jour*.” Bush and Scowcroft quickly reset the tone, with the help of others who supported them, like Eagleburger and Cheney.⁴²

The positive developments in Europe strongly affected the way Bush saw the Iraq issue. He and Scowcroft felt they were at a moment when Franklin D. Roosevelt’s unrealized dreams for the postwar world might at last be coming to fruition. For later generations who want to understand why Bush and some of his

⁴¹ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 303. On American policy and the events immediately leading to the war, see *ibid.*, 304–14; Zachary Karabell and Philip Zelikow with Ernest May, Kirsten Lundberg, and Robert Johnson, “Iraq, 1988–1990: Unexpectedly Heading toward War,” in Ernest May and Philip Zelikow, eds., *Dealing with Dictators: Dilemmas of U.S. Diplomacy and Intelligence Analysis, 1945–1990* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 167–202; and Richard Haass, *War of Necessity War of Choice* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 25–31, 44–59.

⁴² Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 317–24 (quote from page 317). I accompanied Bush and Scowcroft on their 2 August trip to Aspen and had a little involvement in what followed. See also Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 222–38.

aides reacted so strongly to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, it is essential to sense—as they did—the startling juxtaposition of this moment of immense promise in the great European/global struggle with the kind of law of the jungle that seemed exemplified by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

Partly inchoate, people of Bush’s, Scowcroft’s, and Baker’s generation carried in their formative memories a conception and corollary hopes for a revitalized United Nations and a United States working with it, that echoed Roosevelt’s influential vision of great power “policemen” who would stand up to the occasional rogue state in order to secure what Bush would later call a “new world order.”⁴³ By August 1990 Bush and Scowcroft saw a new world emerging, full of hopes that Roosevelt would instantly have understood.

⁴³ FDR began using the “police” metaphor in envisioning a postwar world by August 1941, building it up by 1942 to a notion of four policemen (“the United States, England, and Russia and perhaps China”) which he adhered to for the rest of his life. Warren Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 85–86. The “new world order” concept was mentioned in a November 1990 Bush address in Prague. The concept has antecedents, including Bush’s “commonwealth of free nations” phrase that, in the Prague speech, is pared down to “commonwealth of freedom.” It is no coincidence that Bush would choose newly liberated Prague as the venue for this policy address. For more on the elder Bush’s “new world order” concept, see Hutchings, *American Diplomacy*, 143–49.