Not One Inch Eastward? Bush, Baker, Kohl, Genscher, Gorbachev, and the Origin of Russian Resentment toward NATO Enlargement in February 1990*

One of the biggest sources of tension between the United States and Russia today is the enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), to countries that were either Moscow’s allies in the Warsaw Pact or part of the Soviet Union itself. During the Cold War, Leningrad was roughly twelve hundred miles away from the edge of NATO; now (as St. Petersburg) it is less than a hundred, thanks to the membership of Estonia. Present-day Russian officials insist that the United States, by enabling and supporting this expansion, has broken promises made during the era of the George H. W. Bush presidency and German unification, when the Soviet Union came to an end.

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Ron Asmus, a Clinton State Department official who helped to enlarge NATO, remembers being continually confronted by these claims; Moscow firmly believed that it had “received assurances from the United States, France, and the United Kingdom that NATO enlargement would go no further than eastern Germany.” This view has become conventional popular wisdom. In The New York Review of Books, security analyst George Friedman argued that the Russian invasion of Georgia in the summer of 2008 was a reaction to the fact that “George H.W. Bush... had promised the Russians that NATO would not expand into the former Soviet empire.” Russian leader Vladimir Putin was trying to push back and reestablish a sphere of influence, he argued. Similarly, Bill Keller told readers of The New York Times that the invasion was Putin’s “existential payback” because the United States had “charm[ed] away his neighbors.”

For their part, U.S. foreign policy officials from both the first and second Bush eras as well as the Clinton administration have consistently denied that any such agreement existed. Both Republican and Democratic administrations maintain that what was said in 1990 was a speculative part of the negotiations surrounding German unification and had no significance for the rest of Europe after that deal was done. Scholars have supported this interpretation; Mark Kramer has written of the myth of guarantees against NATO expansion. Russians disagree and, as a result, contradictory memories about the end of the Cold War remain a source of tension and controversy in today’s geopolitics.

In particular, this tension arises from differing interpretations of four fateful bilateral meetings in February 1990: one in Washington, two in Moscow, and one in Camp David. As will be described below, these talks involved (in various combinations) President Bush, Secretary of State James A. Baker III, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, along with Gorbachev’s foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze and top aide Anatoly Chernyaev. When NATO expansion became a reality in the 1990s, Russian negotiators would repeatedly cite these meetings, most notably the Baker-Gorbachev conversation of February 9, 1990, in order to claim—as Asmus put it—“that they had received a US pledge not to enlarge NATO to Central and Eastern Europe.”


Just whose memory of these events is correct is a matter of great importance. Now that most of the parties involved in these talks have released at least some of their records, it has become possible to reconstruct this significant episode of foreign policy from the first Bush era using primary sources. Interviews with participants also help to fill in the gaps. Finally, many of these sources accord well with the rich secondary literature produced by both participants and scholars. What exactly happened in these four February bilaterals, especially the February 9 meeting in Moscow involving Baker and Genscher?

5. The best American sources are the Baker Papers at Mudd Library, Princeton, NJ, and the Bush Presidential Library materials, released early via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). German and Soviet documents are surprisingly accessible as well. A large number of Helmut Kohl’s papers on German unification from mid-1989 to late 1990 or, to be more exact, the records of his office, the Bundeskanzleramt or Federal Chancellery, were published in the truly remarkable volume edited by Hanns Jürgen Küsters and Daniel Hoffman, eds., Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik: Deutsche Einheit, Sonderedition aus den Akten des Bundeskanzleramtes 1989/90 (München, 1998) (hereafter DESE). See also Hartmut Mayer, “Review of Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik: Deutsche Einheit,” in International Affairs 74, no. 4 (October 1998): 952–53. In addition, I also received permission, via the German Freedom of Information Law, to see Bundeskanzleramt documents that were not released. On the Soviet side, materials have been available from the Gorbachev Foundation in Moscow for a number of years. In 2006, Gorbachev decided to follow Kohl’s example and publish a volume of hundreds of documents of his own. Edited by Anatoly Chernyaev and Alexander Galkin, a limited number of copies appeared under the title Михаил Горбачев и германский вопрос (Весь Мир. Москва, 2006) (hereafter MG). However, the documents have since become available online at http://rodon.org/other/mgigv/index.htm; I am grateful to Victor Grinberg for calling my attention to this site. For help in securing and reading Russian sources, I thank Mariya Grinberg, Mark Kramer, Alexander Polunov, Svetlana Savranskaya, and Jennifer Siegel.

6. A list of interview partners is in the acknowledgements at the start of the notes.

7. Nearly all of the key individuals have produced memoirs, and they will be cited individually below. Particularly useful works of secondary literature are the following, in alphabetical order by author: Goldgeier, Not Whether; Thomas Blanton, Svetlana Savranskaya and Vladislav Zubok, eds., Masterpieces of History: The Soviet Peaceful Withdrawal from Eastern Europe (New York, 2010); Jeff Engel, ed., The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989 (Oxford, 2009); Hans-Hermann Hertle. Der Fall der Mauer: Die unbeabsichtigte Selbstauflösung des SED-Staates (Opladen, Germany, 1996); see also Hans-Hermann Hertle, “Germany in the Last Decade of the Cold War,” in Olav Njølstad, ed., The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation, 265–87 (London, 2004); 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, 1997); Charles S. Maier, Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany (Princeton, NJ, 1997); Christopher Maynard, Out of the Shadow: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War (College Station, TX, 2008); Don Oberdorfer, The Turn: From the Cold War to a New Era (New York, 1991); Andreas Rödder, Deutschland Einig Vaterland (München, 2009); Angela Stanton, Russia and Germany Reborn: Unification, the Soviet Collapse, and the New Europe (Princeton, NJ, 1999); Stephen Szabo, The Diplomacy of German Unification (New York, 1992); Odd Arne W estad, ed., Reviewing the Cold War (London, 2000); Zelikow and Rice, Germany Unified. See also the four-volume study by a group of German professors who received early access to West German documents: the result, Geschichte der deutschen Einheit (hereafter GDE), runs a cumulative 3,008 pages. The volume most relevant to this article is the fourth, Werner Weidenfeld, with Peter M. Wagner and Elke Bruck, GDE, Außenpolitik für die deutsche Einheit: Die Entscheidungsjahre 1989/90 (Stuttgart, 1998). There are also useful online sources; see http://www.chronik-der-mauer and http://www.chronik-der-wende.
THE FIRST BILATERAL: BAKER AND GENSCHER IN WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 2, 1990

By the start of 1990, the old Cold War order was in its death throes. Solidarity had entered a coalition government in Poland in 1989 and the Berlin Wall had opened in November of that year. Both the Soviet and East German economies were collapsing. Massive emigration was overwhelming West Germany in early 1990. Bonn and its allies were seeking to restore order in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in a way that would offer long-term stability and prevent refugees from flooding the West.

In the Federal Republic, Kohl’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) was in a coalition with Genscher’s Liberal party (FDP, using its German initials). It was an uneasy alliance, made more troubled by the fact that the eastern affiliates of the CDU and the FDP were competing against each other in the first free East German election, to be held on March 18, 1990. In the run-up to this election, the partnership between the chancellor and the foreign minister was fraying. Gaps appeared publicly between Kohl’s vision for a future united Germany and Genscher’s, when the latter made his plain in a speech to the Evangelical Academy in Tützing on January 31. In this controversial address, Genscher called on NATO to state clearly that, “whatever happens to the Warsaw Pact, an expansion of NATO territory to the East, in other words, closer to the borders of the Soviet Union, will not happen.”

Genscher traveled to Washington DC, on Friday, February 2, 1990, to make sure that Baker agreed with this view of NATO’s future. In front of a roaring fire on a late Friday afternoon, the two foreign ministers spoke for two-and-a-half hours. The atmosphere was friendly, not least because their aides had already met in advance to smooth out any problems. Genscher explained his views, and then Baker sought the West German’s opinion on a concept of his own.

The State Department was coming to the conclusion that some kind of brand new forum for the four major victors of the Second World War plus the two Germanies was necessary to shape unification. This “4 + 2” forum would settle the external aspects of the process while the two Germanies addressed domestic questions amongst themselves. Genscher said he would support the idea of such six-party talks, but only if they were called the “2 + 4”—in other words, with the Germanies clearly identified as the two most important states—rather than the “4 + 2” or just “the six.” Baker thought that this sounded feasible.


Afterward, in a joint press conference, Genscher announced that he and Baker “‘were in full agreement that there is no intention to extend the NATO area of defense and security towards the East.’”10 Baker, aware of tensions between Genscher and Kohl, wanted to make sure that the chancellor was fully informed about this. The secretary instructed the U.S. ambassador in Bonn, Vernon Walters, to report personally to Kohl’s close aide Horst Teltschik about this meeting—something that Baker was apparently not certain Genscher would do, despite the friendly atmosphere of that day. According to Walters, Genscher had suggested that Baker should, on his imminent trip to Moscow “assure the Soviet Union” that NATO would not be extended to the territory of the GDR.11

The following Monday, February 5, 1990, Baker left on a long journey that would eventually take him to Moscow for the second bilateral.12 He was therefore out of Washington as resistance to what he and Genscher had said at their press conference developed within the National Security Council (NSC). Similarly, Genscher journeyed back across the Atlantic as well, only to face opposition back in Bonn from Defense Minister Gerhard Stoltenberg, a member of the CDU. The NSC in Washington and Stoltenberg in Bonn had the exact same worry about their respective foreign ministers’ plans: that an East Germany de facto outside of NATO would be impossible to protect, even if rhetorically a united Germany were to be a full alliance member. Stoltenberg challenged Genscher at a meeting of several West German cabinet members; he simply did not know how a demilitarized East German territory could be defended.13

This first February bilateral had, as a result, set up conflicts within not one but two Western capitals: Washington and Bonn. The foreign ministers of both countries felt that a conciliatory line on NATO would lead to Soviet agreement with unification. The security and defense experts within both administrations felt that such an approach would make unification so impractical as to be impossible. However, the depth of these conflicts would not become clear until after Baker had conducted the second crucial bilateral: meetings with Shevardnadze and then Gorbachev in Moscow.


12. Baker’s scheduling calendars from his time as secretary of state are available in BP.

THE SECOND BILATERAL: BAKER AND GORBACHEV IN MOSCOW, FEBRUARY 9, 1990

Baker headed to Moscow with the idea that the discussion with Genscher formed the basis for his negotiations. There, the secretary would meet leaders who were trying to think beyond the traditional military alliances altogether. Gorbachev was instead advocating an idealistic but vague vision of a Europe without either the Warsaw Pact or NATO.14

This idea was not new. In May 1989, the Warsaw Pact had issued a statement suggesting that the end of both alliances might be on the horizon. Shevardnadze repeated a similar idea in a speech to the Supreme Soviet in October 1989 and again three days later in Warsaw.15 Early in 1990, after months of indecision about how to respond to the collapse of the Berlin Wall the previous November, Gorbachev was returning to this concept. He sought some kind of pan-European structure or confederation that would replace both alliances. It would contain a Germany that would be neutral for the time that the confederation was under construction.16

In understanding the thinking of Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, it is important to note that they had, for a while, achieved something roughly similar to what Nixon and Kissinger had done in the détente era. By removing old military, institutional and party hierarchies from the foreign policy decision-making process, they had created what historian Vladislav Zubok calls “virtually unlimited space for foreign policy innovations.”17 But flexibility came at a cost: having cut critics out of the loop at home, they were less prepared than they should have been for critics abroad. No domestic constituencies had forced them to make these visions specific. As a result, Gorbachev and his trusted aides lost time mulling over broad ideas and were not prepared for the rapid pace of events. In addition, after they made top-level decisions, lower-level negotiators who disagreed with them would seek to have input belatedly by undercutting their bosses in the details of implementation. Countries dealing with the USSR would, as a result, continually face contradictions between what seemed to be agreed at the top level and what would actually be offered in practical terms once experts got down to work.

14. As Zelikow and Rice put it, he had not yet “internalized” the different view of the NSC; see their Germany Unified, 187. For more on Gorbachev’s alternate vision, see my book 1989.
The Gorbachev-Baker meeting of February 9, 1990 and its aftermath would display all of these traits. Because it is the most controversial bilateral, it is worth examining the participants in it and their mental maps in some detail.\textsuperscript{18} Gorbachev and Baker brought vastly different expectations and experiences to this meeting, though on paper they shared much. Born within a year of each other (Baker in 1930, Gorbachev in 1931), both had gotten married in 1953, started families soon thereafter, and climbed to the highest political reaches of their respective home superpowers. But Gorbachev had come of age in a country weakened by Stalin’s murderous reign and two world wars, whereas Baker did the same in a country on the ascendant. Gorbachev’s childhood memories of the 1930s included the disappearance of his grandfather, Pantelei Yefimovich Gopkalo, who was taken away in the middle of the night during Stalin’s purges of 1937–38. His grandmother moved in with his family, and neighbors shunned them as a result, Gorbachev remembers, because they feared guilt by association. Even relatives would only visit at night. Gopkalo was eventually released, but refused to say what had happened, and would die not long thereafter. Later in life, Gorbachev would write about how he tracked down the records of his grandfather’s interrogation and spoke to his cellmates. Gopkalo had refused to confess, which intensified the tortures. When beating did not work, both of his arms were broken. When that did not work, he was forced to sit on a burning stove. Gorbachev, when he met his future wife Raisa, would find out that his family had been lucky; they had at least seen their grandfather again. Her grandfather, arrested under similar circumstances, had been convicted and executed.\textsuperscript{19}

In contrast, having the good fortune to grow up in a prosperous country, James Baker had very different memories of the 1930s and 1940s. Baker thought of the River Oaks Country Club in Houston as his “second home” when he was a child, and he forged a close bond with his tennis coach there, Andrew Jitkoff, whom he regarded as a “second father.” A refugee, Jitkoff had been born in Russia at the turn of the century but fled during the Bolshevik revolution. He would reminisce about Russian history to Baker, who later, as a student at Princeton, would study European history.\textsuperscript{20} (However, Baker’s own military service in the U.S. Marine Corps took place in Asia, not Europe.)

\textsuperscript{18} Political leaders often revert to beliefs and expectations established in younger years when facing challenges during their period of rule later. Such beliefs and expectations have been called an “operational code” by one political scientist. See Alexander George, “The ‘Operational Code’: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Decision-Making,” \textit{International Studies Quarterly} 12 (June 1969), 190–222.


Even though both Gorbachev and Baker went on to attain success in their chosen field—the former in party work, the latter in the law—the discrepancy in living standards between their two countries continued to shape the men’s lives into adulthood. When he was first married, Gorbachev and his wife Raisa lived in a small room in Stavropol with no running water; they had to fetch it from a pump. The intervention of well-connected friends got the young couple moved to an apartment with both a kitchen and a toilet—but also roommates, including “a welder, a retired colonel, a mechanic working in a garment factory, and their families” along with “an alcoholic bachelor and his mother” in addition to “four single women.”

The Soviet Union’s chronic housing shortage meant such combinations were not uncommon.

The material conditions of daily life in Houston in the 1950s and 1960s, especially for someone at the apex of the city’s social ladder, were obviously very different from those in Stavropol. Baker enjoyed the fruits of his hard work and success as a lawyer, including membership at the Houston Country Club, where he and his doubles partner George H. W. Bush won repeated championships. Despite his wealth and prominence, however, Baker was not untouched by suffering: doctors were unable to save his first wife from an early death of cancer, leaving him a single father in 1970. Bush’s efforts to distract Baker from his sorrow afterward included getting him involved in politics, and the two began their ultimately successful rise to the White House and the State Department.

Baker would see the discrepancy in living standards for himself in May 1989, when he finally got his first opportunity to visit the Soviet Union. As his car drove into Moscow, he felt as if he “had been transported back in time... Stalinesque buildings that seemed to have been built in the 1930s and 1940s looked as though they hadn’t been repaired or painted since then.” He remembered that the “few cars and trucks on the streets appeared to have come from the 1950s and 1960s.” But he was also struck by Shevardnadze’s hospitality. The Soviet foreign minister invited Baker and his second wife to a dinner at his private apartment. Baker was particularly pleased when Shevardnadze gave him a shotgun as a gift. The evening was the beginning of a “close and warm friendship.”

Now, in February 1990, Baker was back in Moscow, but between his initial visit in May 1989 and his February 1990 one, the world had changed significantly. Revolution had spread throughout Eastern Europe. Moscow was in a much tougher position than a year earlier. That week’s Central Committee meeting had been overshadowed by a protest of a quarter of a million people in Moscow, calling for greater democracy. Rising separatism was intensifying

23. Ibid., 72–77.
throughout the USSR, causing intense regional conflicts. Very soon, ethnic rioting would erupt in Tajikistan, and problems with the Baltics would intensify. Economic woes intensified, and shortages were becoming as severe as in wartime. The Soviet Union, once seemingly invincible, now appeared to be tearing apart at the seams.\(^{24}\)

In addition to these problems, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze approached their talks with a further expectation that would prove to be a liability. They had both grown up in a system with decision-making authority concentrated at the very top. A few men, or even one man, made far-reaching, life-or-death decisions, ones that sent grandfathers to interrogations or soldiers to the front. Those decisions took precedence over any written constitutional or legal guarantees and were not subject to any kind of oversight. Soviet negotiators of all ranks might be sticklers for legalistic detail in their dealings with the West, but the very elite level was another matter. Baker, in contrast, had made his professional living in the contentious field of law in the United States. He understood the dynamic between negotiation and agreement; that much could be said, contested, denied, or suggested in discussion, but that what resulted in writing at the end was what mattered. It was the final, written version of any agreement that would be enforced in a society where the rule of law prevailed. And on top of these very differing expectations, there was also the problem that the teams spoke different languages, meaning that nuances could change unintentionally in translation.

Baker’s series of Moscow meetings began on February 7, 1990. He spent two days in talks with Shevardnadze, and then saw Gorbachev on February 9. As in the past, arms control was a large component of all of the talks. It was an abiding passion of Gorbachev’s; as scholars Vojtech Mastny and Malcolm Byrne put it, Gorbachev “was admirable, as Reagan was, in his sincere belief in a nuclear-free world—a mirage that made it difficult for the two leaders to reach an agreement on more practical matters.”\(^{25}\) Bush did not share that dream, but he did believe that it was time to cut back on conventional forces. As a result, in his recent State of the Union address, Bush had proposed the reduction of U.S. and Soviet troops in Central and Eastern Europe to 195,000 each.\(^{26}\) However, he wanted to keep more American troops in Europe outside of the central zone, and the Russians were not happy about it. The issue would not be resolved while Baker


was in Moscow, but later in the month Gorbachev would accept Bush’s proposal.\(^{27}\)  

The elephant in the various meeting rooms was, of course, Germany.\(^{28}\) Baker’s notes from the meetings with Shevardnadze indicate that they discussed the 2 + 4 framework as a better idea than trying to resurrect occupation-style four-power control, which the “Germans won’t buy.” They also discussed the U.S. desire for a united Germany to remain in NATO. In his handwritten notes from this discussion, Baker put stars and an exclamation point next to one of his key statements: “End result: Unified Ger. anchored in a *changed (polit.) NATO—*whose juris. would not move *eastward!”\(^{29}\)

Baker repeated this comment to Gorbachev on February 9 and speculated that a Germany in NATO would be a safer proposition than a united country outside of the alliance. The Soviet leader replied that any expansion of the “zone of NATO” was not acceptable.\(^{30}\) Baker responded, according to Gorbachev, “we agree with that.” This statement was extremely significant to Gorbachev; indeed, he later recalled it as the moment that “cleared the way for a compromise” on Germany.\(^{31}\) Based on it, he would make a big concession to Kohl the next day at the third bilateral (to be described shortly).

This moment also forms the nucleus of the ongoing controversy, because, unwisely, Gorbachev let the meeting end without securing anything in written form. Baker had been speaking speculatively, as part of an ongoing negotiation process, and had neither offered nor been asked to put anything in writing. But Gorbachev, emerging from a political culture in which the word of a leader overruled the law, hoping that he could still find a way to disband both military alliances entirely, and hesitating to agree to his end of the bargain (a unified Germany), did not try to resolve the matter there. In the future, he would therefore leave the Soviet Union’s successors empty handed when they protested against NATO expansion. To make matters more complicated, he


\(^{28}\) For an in-depth study of USSR anxieties about the concept of German unity, see Rafael Biermann, *Zwischen Kreml und Kanzleramt: Wie Moskau mit der deutschen Einheit rang* (Paderborn, Germany, 1997).

\(^{29}\) “JAB notes from 2/7–9/90 Ministerial Mtgs., w/ USSR FM Shevardnadze, Moscow USSR,” Note “GERMANY 2/8/90,” folder 14, box 108, 8c monthly files, series 8, BP; see also copies in folder 13, box 176, 12b chapter files, series 12; Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 202–06.


\(^{31}\) Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 529.
would also vary his own position in later statements, and face in-fighting with military advisers who balked at implementing the practical accords necessary. As a result, a number of contradictory signals would emerge from Moscow later.

For Baker such contradictions were to be expected, since he did not consider their meeting as definitive. On the contrary, his time in Moscow was one in a number of conversations and negotiations that would be, until final documents were signed, in flux. Moreover, the matter could hardly be decided without the rest of NATO and the West Germans, who were scheduled to have their own conversation with Gorbachev the next day.

Baker departed very close to Kohl’s own arrival on Saturday, February 10. The secretary and the chancellor intentionally avoided meeting, however. The goal, as Baker put it, was to prevent “the public impression in the Soviet Union that somehow the Americans and the Germans were conspiring against them.” In reality, of course, “we were consulting continuously,” and Baker put together a letter summarizing his talks with Gorbachev, intended for Kohl’s eyes only when he arrived. The secretary of state arranged for it to be given to the West German ambassador to the USSR, Klaus Blech, who made sure Kohl received it as soon as possible after his arrival in Moscow.32

“Dear Mr. Chancellor,” Baker’s letter began. “In light of your meeting with President Gorbachev, the President wanted me to brief you on the talks I’ve had in Moscow.” Baker listed Gorbachev’s and Shevardnadze’s fears about a potential German unification and said that he had tried to assuage them by proposing the 2 + 4 mechanism, which seemed to meet with approval. The secretary had also explained to Gorbachev that a united Germany would prefer to stay in NATO. “And then I put the following question to him. Would you prefer to see a unified Germany outside of NATO, independent and with no US forces or would you prefer a unified Germany to be tied to NATO, with assurances that NATO’s jurisdiction would not shift one inch eastward from its present position?” Gorbachev had answered that he would consider the matter further and had added that “‘any extension of the zone of NATO would be unacceptable.’” In short, Baker thought that Gorbachev was “not locked-in” following their talks, and he looked forward “to comparing notes with you [Kohl] after your meeting. Sincerely yours, Jim.”33 In short, both Baker and Gorbachev appear to have left their talks in an optimistic mood but for different reasons. Gorbachev thought he had already had a workable deal; Baker thought that he had made progress towards one. Gorbachev’s misperception would incline him toward generosity towards Kohl.

THE THIRD BILATERAL: GORBACHEV AND KOHL IN MOSCOW, FEBRUARY 10, 1990

Baker’s note to Kohl was the second major missive that the chancellor had received from top U.S. leadership in the same number of days. He had gotten another letter directly from Bush the night before, as he was preparing to depart for Moscow. The presidential message had indicated a subtle but significant difference from Baker on the subject of the alliance. Instead of promising no expansion to NATO’s jurisdiction, Bush limited himself to promising a “special military status for what is now the territory of the GDR,” in other words, a special status for it within NATO as the alliance expanded its territory.34

Philip Zelikow, who as an NSC staffer at the time was involved in drafting this letter, remembered the presidential message as a conscious attempt to counter the view that Baker was expressing. As described above, the NSC felt that if Baker’s ideas were implemented, there would be no way to defend the eastern part of a united Germany. Sending a letter from the president to Kohl just before the chancellor left for Moscow was a way of signalling a different line from Baker.35

As a result, by the time Kohl began his own talks in Moscow, he had received letters containing the views of Bush and Baker, and they were not identical. A foreign leader, the old saying goes, can see daylight between a president and a secretary of state from thousands of miles away, but Kohl only had to look down at the two letters he had received to see it. He therefore faced the challenge of deciding which version to echo in his own talks with Gorbachev. When the time came, he would use Baker’s language rather than Bush’s; that is, the chancellor would offer assurances that NATO territory would not expand, as opposed to offering a special military status for the GDR within NATO as it expanded. Whether Kohl did so because he had missed the discrepancy between the two letters, or because he knew what the discrepancy meant but found Baker’s approach more useful as a short-term negotiating tactic, is unclear from the evidence currently available.36

What is clear is that he and Teltschik were willing to do everything possible to soften up Gorbachev. They had already prepared the ground before their departure with a well-timed announcement that the sky was falling. In a briefing for journalists before the Moscow trip, Teltschik had strategically let slip that East Germany was on the brink of insolvency. It would be unable to pay debtors in a few days. This caused an enormous splash in the media, and so headlines

35. Zelikow’s e-mail with the author in 2008.
36. Multiple requests for an interview with Helmut Kohl in the years 2008–09 did not yield a positive result in time for the writing of this article.
about economic doomsday in the GDR accompanied Kohl to Moscow and strengthened his case that drastic measures were needed.\(^\text{37}\)

The chancellor was therefore in a strong situation when he finally sat down at the negotiating table with the Soviet leader in Moscow on February 10 for his own bilateral. Kohl started off by explaining to Gorbachev that he wanted to unify Germany and bring it into NATO but, like Baker, felt that “naturally NATO could not expand its territory to the current territory of the GDR.” It was not technically within Kohl’s authority to make promises on behalf of NATO, but he spoke in a manner suggesting that his country’s influence would prevail in such matters. Gorbachev asked a number of questions in response. He wanted to know about the potential timeline and about border issues with Poland. He understood that Germany did not want to become a neutral state but asked if it could perhaps be nonaligned, like India. Then, according to Kohl, after hearing the chancellor’s assurances about NATO and his answers to these questions, Gorbachev gave him a breakthrough. The Soviet leader agreed with Kohl—although somewhat less than whole-heartedly—that the question of internal unity was one for the Germans alone to decide. Sensing what another quid pro quo might be, Kohl made clear that Gorbachev could count on him for financial help. The chancellor pointed out that the German economy was in a very healthy state. Indeed, “the last eight years were the best since the war.” It was therefore “natural,” that West Germany and the Soviet Union “could do much together.”\(^\text{38}\)

Gorbachev had just done something dangerous: he had agreed to his end of the deal (letting Germany unify) without getting the potential reward (no expansion of NATO) written down or even publicized. Unlike Gorbachev, Kohl correctly recognized a fleeting but valuable opportunity. The chancellor moved to formalize it in public as quickly as possible. He called for a press conference for 10:00 p.m. that same night; one had been scheduled for the next day, but that was no longer soon enough for him. He needed to pounce. West German television viewers heard Kohl proclaim that it was “a good day for Germany.” Gorbachev, he explained, had agreed that it was the “sole right of the Germans” to make decisions about their future.\(^\text{39}\) The journalists present did not seem to realize the significance, but Kohl and his delegation did. Afterwards, they were so excited by the breakthrough that they needed a long walk through Red

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Square in the wee hours before they could calm down enough to go to sleep in the small hours.40

In summary, Gorbachev had listened to Baker and Kohl suggest to him for two days in a row that NATO’s jurisdiction would not move eastward, and at the end he had agreed to let Germany unify. It had happened so quickly that a number of journalists and politicians at the time missed the full import of the day. Also, the fact that the Soviet leader made the concession to the West German, not the American, surprised a number of observers. Later, Gorbachev would try to backtrack, and unhappy advisers would try to undercut what had happened, producing a number of contradictory signals. But a significant step had taken place, and Kohl had made sure that it could not be undone. Because of Kohl’s quick action, the unresolved issues surrounding NATO became all the more pressing.

SECOND THOUGHTS IN WASHINGTON BEFORE THE FOURTH BILATERAL

Kohl was happy, but Baker and his team still had some difficult conversations ahead of them. There was no rest in the short term as they sought to defuse tensions both abroad and at home. First, after leaving Europe, Baker went to Ottawa for an unusual meeting of all NATO and Warsaw Pact foreign ministers. Ostensibly the goal was to discuss international aviation, but the headline issue remained questions surrounding German unification. In Ottawa, Baker succeeded in convincing all of the relevant nations to start 2 + 4 talks. Like Kohl, as soon as the deal was done, he called for a short-notice press conference to announce that all parties had agreed and that meeting would start soon.41

But even though the secretary succeeded in selling his ideas about 2 + 4 to the relevant foreign countries, he and his aides still had to sell them back home. At a State Department background briefing after his trip, run by his spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler, a Washington journalist asked if someone could “talk a little bit about how you see this shaking down. If both sides get to 195 [thousand troops in the central zone of Europe] do the 195 Soviet troops stay in an otherwise demilitarized East Germany that is part of a unified Germany that is part of NATO? That sounds a little surreal to most of us.” The answer: “I know. But German unification used to sound surreal to a lot of people too.”42

The notion of an East Germany, unified with the West but with Soviet troops instead of NATO defenses on its territory, sounded surreal to the NSC as well. Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser, was particularly worried about Baker’s suggestion that NATO’s jurisdiction would not move one inch eastward.

40. GDE, vol. IV, 247.
41. The Ottawa conference is described in greater detail in my book 1989.
42. “EUR daily press guidances—February 14, 1990,” run by Margaret Tutwiler, in NSC, Wilson, FOIA 2001–1166–F, BL. While Tutwiler ran the session, it is not clear if she was the person providing this answer or not.
If the Soviet Union could, in fact, be sure that NATO would never expand by a single inch, then it could stall or prevent unification, because acquiring an indefensible territory would simply not be a viable solution for a united Germany.\textsuperscript{43}

It was the NATO secretary general, Manfred Wörner, who had circulated the idea that had become the NSC’s favorite method of proceeding. Wörner, a former West German CDU politician himself, had spoken publicly on February 8 and originated the phrase “special military status” that would appear in the Bush letter of the next day.\textsuperscript{44} The NSC, in particular its members Robert Blackwill and Zelikow, had seen Wörner’s idea as the way forward, and for that reason convinced Scowcroft and ultimately Bush to include it in the February 9 letter that the president had sent to Kohl on the eve of the latter’s departure for Moscow.\textsuperscript{45}

This method of proceeding on the subject of NATO seemed to the NSC like it might work; but the $2 + 4$ mechanism did not seem feasible. However, it was already a done deal. The Ottawa press conference had made clear that six-party talks would happen and would last until some agreement was reached on how to surrender quadripartite occupation rights to a unified Germany. As a result, this forum had become a \textit{fait accompli} much faster than anyone had expected and without serious NSC assessment of it. Scowcroft would later remark that it was his fault for not scheduling a discussion sooner, “but I had thought that Baker was only taking soundings among the allies” on his trip and that the NSC and Bush administration more broadly would have a chance to vet the idea later.\textsuperscript{46}

Scowcroft and his staff were afraid that the $2 + 4$ mechanism was both too weak and too strong. Too weak because, as NSC staffer Condoleezza Rice noted, Gorbachev could “dilute [sic] the $2 + 4$ process” with his preference for “‘all-Europeaness.’”\textsuperscript{47} It might also be too strong, because it would give the USSR another means of obstructing unity. Robert Zoellick of the State Department reportedly defended Baker’s belief in $2 + 4$ by saying that “the presence of 380,000 Soviet troops in the GDR was means enough for obstruction”; the $2 + 4$ would recognize and manage that obstructive power, not add to it.\textsuperscript{48} Besides, it was now agreed and the NSC could not undo it. The best it could do was ensure that the $2 + 4$ did not have real veto power.

Once Baker finally got back to Washington in mid-February, he heard the full array of these worries personally.\textsuperscript{49} The secretary of state ceased suggesting

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43} Author’s interview with Zelikow in 2008.
\item \textsuperscript{44} “Speech by NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner [sic], Hamburg,” February 8, 1990, in Freedman, \textit{Documents}, 462–66, see especially page 466.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Zelikow and Rice, \textit{Germany Unified}, 186–87, and footnote 62 on page 423.
\item \textsuperscript{46} George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, \textit{A World Transformed} (New York, 1998), 243.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Handwritten notes on side of “Moscow domestic service in Russian 1900 GMT 20 Feb 90,” in Condoleezza Rice, NSC PRS files, released as part of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request number 2001–1166–F, BL.
\item \textsuperscript{48} The quotation is Szabo’s summary of what Zoellick said, in Szabo, \textit{Diplomacy}, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Author’s interview with Zelikow in 2008; Goldgeier, \textit{Not Whether but When}, 15.
\end{itemize}
that NATO would not move eastward. Although Gorbachev did not realize it until later, what Baker had said to him in Moscow about NATO was not the settled position of the Bush administration, but rather a concept still under consideration and now superseded.

However, Baker strongly defended his 2 + 4 mechanism. His notes for a meeting at the White House on Friday, February 16, show that he spoke to Wörner, got up to date on NATO thinking, and was ready to argue his corner. To those who claimed that 2 + 4 might cause obstruction to German unification, he replied that 2 + 4 was about “discussions, not decisions.” His handwritten notes in the margins emphasized this point: “2 + 4 is not negotiation it’s consultation.” While it was clear that the “Soviets Brits. + French will want more decision making auth[ority],” Washington should just keep repeating that “it’s a framework + mech[anism] for managing ext[ernal] aspects of German unif[i-cation].” In his view, the 2 + 4 forum was not a worry but a success. Since neither the “2, 4, 16, or 35 would work,” meaning that neither the two Germanies, nor the four powers, nor NATO, nor the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) could manage it, this was the least bad alternative. It was “probably the bare minimum process the Soviets will need to express their interests and justify the result at home.” The implication of Baker’s argument was that it would prove to be the least costly way of getting a united Germany into the Western alliance. To his mind, the 2 + 4 forum would equal full NATO membership. And this forum had a major additional benefit, one that addressed Scowcroft’s worry that Bonn and Moscow could shut out Washington. “Frankly, it’s in our interest as well as it prevents separate German-Soviet deals that could be prejudicial to our interests.”

In short, after his Moscow bilateral, Baker would cease to suggest that NATO’s jurisdiction would not move eastward. However, it had been upon hearing this proposition, not only from Baker, but also from Kohl, that Gorbachev had agreed to let Germany unify internally. Kohl had wisely publicized Gorbachev’s consent, but there was no publicity or written documentation that the Soviet leader could show later to prove that he had received assurances about NATO as his part of the bargain. To complicate matters, the Soviet side would fail to address this issue during the subsequent process of finalizing the accords about German unity in writing in 1990; Moscow did not get written guarantees in the treaties it signed.

Meanwhile, exactly what a special military status for East Germany would entail still needed to be thrashed out. Kohl would be arriving on Saturday, February 24, for the fourth bilateral, a Camp David meeting, and that would give the Bonn and Washington teams a chance to address difficult issues. Baker hoped that Kohl would bring Genscher as well, since always having to inform

50 “Proposed Agenda for Meeting with the President, Friday, February 16, 1990, 1:30pm,” with handwritten notes by Baker, folder 7, box 115, 8e White House meetings and notes, series 8, BP.
both the Chancellery and the Foreign Ministry in Bonn was getting tiresome. “Frankly, it’s difficult to manage this on two tracks, and it would help us if we could urge the Germans to make it easier for us to discuss these items with the two of them together,” Baker noted at the time.  

Kohl did not, in fact, bring Genscher when he arrived at Dulles Airport on that Saturday afternoon for the weekend at Camp David. Instead, only Teltchik, aides Walter Neuer and Uwe Kaeestner, and Kohl’s wife, Hannelore, came along. In his memoirs, Kohl said that he left Genscher behind because the Americans had announced Baker would not attend. In fact, not only was Baker there, but he hoped that Genscher would be too. Either someone outside of the State Department on the U.S. side had quietly vetoed Genscher’s participation, or Kohl had decided that he wanted to make important decisions without his difficult coalition partner.

THE FOURTH BILATERAL: BUSH AND KOHL AT CAMP DAVID, FEBRUARY 24–25, 1990

The weekend talks represented the first visit to Camp David by a West German chancellor, an honor not lost on the Bonn delegation. Teltchik remembers a warm and friendly atmosphere developing rapidly as the group arrived and sat in front of a fire. Although a number of topics were discussed, including Polish demands for border guarantees and British support of them, the future of NATO proved to be the most important topic. Camp David was where the Americans and West Germans reached final agreement on their joint position on the alliance, and they would eventually be successful in implementing their wishes (though not without much effort) in October 1990. Kohl seems to have been considering something like a French status within NATO for a united Germany, but Bush and Kohl agreed at Camp David that a unified Germany had to be a full member of the alliance. At most, Eastern regions might have Wörner’s “special military status,” but the full might of the Article Five mutual defense guarantee would apply.

Moreover, the president and the chancellor were of one mind on how to secure agreement with Gorbachev. The Soviet leader’s bottom line, they agreed, would not be military; it would be “the question of cash.” Moscow needed money badly and was in a weak position. (Indeed, the very next day massive protests in Moscow would further undermine Gorbachev. As a result, Bush felt that the Soviet Union could not make demands about the future. “To hell with that!” he exclaimed. “We prevailed, they didn’t. We can’t let the Soviets clutch victory from

51. “Proposed Agenda for Meeting with the President, Friday, February 16, 1990, 1:30 pm”; see also Hutchings, American Diplomacy, 109–14.
53. Teltchik, 329 Tage, 159.
54. See Hutchings, American Diplomacy, for more discussion of difficulties within the USSR.
the jaws of defeat.” He would not allow Moscow to determine NATO’s membership. Kohl agreed, and guessed that the USSR would eventually accept—and even be happy with—a united Germany in NATO, “but they will want to be paid for it.” Bush and Baker made clear that the United States would not be offering financial support to their long-time enemy, not least because of the weakening of the domestic American economy at the time. As a result, it was clear who would be responsible for paying that price. The president pointed out that the chancellor had “deep pockets,” but the hint was hardly necessary.

Bush and Kohl were right. Gorbachev would eventually, after various reversals and much in-fighting at home, accept the Western position on NATO. He did so in July in the Caucasus at another meeting with Kohl. Although no one could be certain in February 1990 that the decisions made then would be the lasting ones, and indeed at many points afterward it did not look like that might be possible, it turned out to be the case nonetheless. Gorbachev agreed to let a united Germany become a full member of NATO with a special military status for GDR territory. In exchange, he got what Bush and Kohl had correctly predicted he would want: cash and credits. In September, there would be a last-minute panic when the Soviet leader actually named the specific sum that he wanted, which was substantially larger than expected, and made its acceptance a condition for signing the final treaty produced by the 2+4 negotiations. However, Kohl’s pockets were deep enough to save the day.

In concluding, two large questions need answers. First, when did the idea of NATO moving eastward come to mean more than to just East German territory? Secondly, is there historical evidence to support Moscow’s claim that such movement was prohibited by the events of February 1990?

Conclusion

In concluding, two large questions need answers. First, when did the idea of NATO moving eastward come to mean more than to just East German territory? Secondly, is there historical evidence to support Moscow’s claim that such movement was prohibited by the events of February 1990?

55. Bush and Scowcroft, World Transformed, 253. In general, the quotations in this book correspond very closely to the documents that have been released, so presumably quotations from unreleased documents, such as this one, may be used with a high degree of confidence. For an analysis of this particular comment, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlfarth, “Economic Constraints and the Turn towards Superpower Cooperation in the 1980s,” in Njolstad, Last Decade, 105–6.


57. On the Caucasus agreement and its consequences, see the documents from July, August and September 1990 in DESE, discussed at greater length in my book 1998; see also Hannes Adomeit, Imperial Overstretch: Germany in Soviet Policy from Stalin to Gorbachev (Baden-Baden, 1998).

58. On the lack of clarity, see Stent, Germany and Russia, 140–1: “The record shows that no explicit promises on NATO expansion were made, but what was implied during the negotiations ultimately lies in the eyes of the beholder.”
First, all of the February 1990 bilaterals described above focused on the question of whether or not NATO would extend itself over the GDR. However, interviews and documents suggest that, as they were concluding, the concept of further enlargement emerged. State Department analyst Harvey Sicherman, in a March 12, 1990 report prepared for Ross and Zoellick, argued as follows: East Europeans living between difficult neighbors would naturally look to the United States for help in the future. Washington “must be sure, however, that (1) taking on the burden of ‘organizing’ this region is really a vital interest [and] (2) we have the means to do so. My answer tentatively is that we alone do not have the means but that NATO and the EC surely do. The Alliance is the best way out of the German-Russian security dilemma and ... the Hungarians and the Poles already see it.” He was right; they did see it that way. Already on February 20, 1990, Gyula Horn had publicly suggested that his country, Hungary, should begin forging closer ties to NATO with a view to “eventually being integrated” in its political bodies. At the time this suggestion was speculative, and tentative Polish feelers in the same direction initially received a cool reply. In the years to come, however, East Europeans would succeed in pressing for alliance membership themselves.

Sicherman’s memo made its way to Baker, who kept a copy for his personal papers upon leaving office. His ideas gradually made their way into the thinking of his bosses. In separate interviews, Baker, Zelikow, and Zoellick all indicated that there were musings at the State Department in the latter half of 1990 about the possibility of NATO expansion, although only in a speculative way. This consideration was the source, in part, of the desire of the United States to increase direct contact between NATO and individual Warsaw Pact member states, as opposed to between NATO and the pact as a whole; the former kind of contacts set up cooperation directly between the alliance and East European states. By July 3, 1990, Zoellick would be arguing to Baker and Bush that it would be crucial to provide structure for East Europeans once their own institutions, most notably the Warsaw Pact, collapsed.

Given that there was U.S. speculation on moving the alliance eastward, did this violate a prohibition established in February 1990? Or, to return to the question asked at the outset, are the Americans or are the Russians right about the meaning of the key bilaterals of that month? Both are to some extent, and that is the heart of the problem. Understanding why involves summarizing the crucial moments from the bilaterals.

59. Memorandum from Harvey Sicherman to S/P—Dennis Ross, and C—Robert Zoellick, March 12, 1990, in folder 14, box 176, series 12, BP.
60. Gyula Horn’s comment is discussed in Mastny and Byrne, Cardboard Castle, 71; the direct quotation from Horn is in Mark Kramer, “The Myth of the No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia,” 41; see also 58, footnote 16 in Kramer for a description of the Polish proposal by Jan Rylukowski.
62. “Notes from Jim Cicconi [notetaker] re: 7/3/90 pre-NATO Summit briefing at Kennebunkport,” folder 3, box 109, 8c monthly files, BP.
Baker, according to the book by Zelikow and Rice, made clear to Kohl what he had discussed with Gorbachev: a unified Germany, tied to NATO “with assurances that NATO’s jurisdiction would not shift one inch eastward from its present position.” Baker and Zelikow said that the discussion with Gorbachev dealt solely with East Germany and no other states of the Warsaw Pact. During an interview in 2009, Baker recalled that this position was not a pledge, but a speculative proposition for the purpose of negotiations. Had Gorbachev agreed to it at the time, it might have become a deal. But the Soviet leader did not, and it was superseded by later changes to the U.S. position that were made public by the time of the Camp David meeting later that February. Baker remembered that Gorbachev did not object to this changed position at the time or later, when it was twice personally communicated to the Soviet leader by both the secretary and President Bush, once in Moscow and once in Washington. Indeed, Gorbachev approved the Soviet Union’s signing of a number of final agreements consistent with the changed position.  

More problematic are the events of the next day, February 10. Kohl arrived and reinforced Baker’s proposition by echoing it in his own conversation with Gorbachev. Unlike the U.S.-USSR bilateral, however, the USSR-West German bilateral did not end in speculation. Instead, Gorbachev agreed to his component of the bargain: he said that Germany could unify internally. Kohl took this concession and publicized it within hours of receiving it. As a result, in understanding the origin of Russian resentment about the events of February 1990, it is essential to consider not just U.S.-Soviet contacts, but also the role of the West Germans as well. Gorbachev did not act upon Baker’s speculation, but he did act upon Kohl’s. The way in which this happened was problematic in at least two ways: on the part of Gorbachev and on the part of Kohl. Gorbachev did something unwise, namely fulfilling at least some of his part of the bargain without getting written assurances that the other side would do the same; and Kohl got such a bargain on the basis of a U.S. position that was already in flux, as the Bush letter made clear. If Gorbachev had been a more aggressive negotiator and had not had so many other distracting balls in the air, he might have pressed for written guarantees from either Baker or Kohl. But he did not, and by the end of February it was clear that he would never get them. Gorbachev appears not to have understood this sequence of events at the time, although by the end of the year he would angrily turn on Kohl, saying to the chancellor that he felt like he had fallen into a “trap.” As for Kohl, in the course of the Camp David meeting at the end of February he came to agree with the Bush position: simply a special military status for the GDR, not general assurances about

63. Interview with Baker in 2009.
NATO’s territory. The chancellor agreed with the president despite the fact that this was not what he had discussed with Gorbachev two weeks earlier.

Later Russian leaders would look back at these happenings and cry foul, although the focus would be on the United States. Subsequent American administrations found it necessary to respond to these complaints as a result. A memorandum written by Clinton-era Assistant Secretary of State John Kornblum, and approved by the State Department legal team, argued that Baker’s words applied only to Germany. This memorandum is the basis for the view, already mentioned in the introduction to this article, that Baker was speaking solely in his authority as a representative of one of the four powers still technically occupying Germany in 1990. Baker meant only that NATO’s jurisdiction would not move eastward within a united Germany, because he did not have the authority to speak for other regions, let alone NATO itself.65

Gorbachev and his advisers may be forgiven for thinking that the United States did carry sufficient weight within NATO in 1990 to speak on its behalf and beyond just its role in united Germany. Certainly contemporaneous documents show that the United States and West Germany working together had the ability, in the spring and summer of 1990, to lead the alliance in directions that they wanted it to go.66 It was a reasonable assumption on the part of Gorbachev that, if a trusted confidante of the U.S. president made remarks about the future of NATO in 1990, and those remarks were immediately seconded personally by the head of West Germany, then those remarks would de facto carry a great deal of weight. Perhaps because of this consideration, Zelikow analyzed Baker’s comments differently. He did not try to parse the phrases that Baker had said to Gorbachev on February 9, 1990. Rather, Zelikow argued in a 1995 newspaper op-ed—entitled “NATO Expansion Wasn’t Ruled Out”—that the language of that day was irrelevant, because it was superseded by later developments about which Gorbachev was clearly informed. As Zelikow put it, the changed U.S. position on NATO expansion “was immediately publicized. It was presented directly to Mr. Gorbachev by Mr. Baker in Moscow on May 18, and presented to Mr. Gorbachev again by Mr. Bush in Washington on May 31. Mr. Gorbachev did not oppose the new formula.”67 In other words, on top of failing to get assurances in writing from Baker, Gorbachev missed opportunities to challenge the United States on the topic later.

Gorbachev’s eventual successors, Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, were not swayed by any of these explanations. They saw the failure to resist NATO

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65. I have filed a FOIA request for this document, and I am grateful to both Asmus and Kornblum for discussing it and e-mailing about it with me in 2008. See also Asmus, Opening, 307–08, footnote 7.
66. Particularly at the summit in July 1990, where the decisions to be reached were essentially agreed by Washington and Bonn in advance. When Washington and Bonn disagreed, as they did over short-range nuclear forces, then matters became more problematic. See my book 1989 for discussion of both.
expansion as a massive strategic error. Putin in particular felt strongly that the alliance was an impediment to Russia assuming its full role in Europe. As he would later remark: “No matter where our people live, in the Far East or in the south, we are Europeans.” Russians “would have avoided a lot of problems if the Soviets had not made such a hasty exit from Eastern Europe.” And Medvedev, Putin’s hand-picked successor, spoke sarcastically in a 2008 speech about “the unbridled expansion of NATO and other gifts to Russia.” He particularly resented the decision in August of that year to base ten interceptor missiles in Poland and the corresponding radar equipment in the Czech Republic as part of a plan to erect missile defense. Medvedev suspected that the equipment being installed could also have offensive uses. Even Gorbachev himself emerged to blame the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia—which he thought was justified—on the “unending expansion of NATO . . . set against the backdrop of sweet talk about partnership.” To counter it, Gorbachev endorsed a plan by Medvedev: to set up a new “security architecture” for Europe as NATO celebrated its sixtieth birthday.

For a moment in February 1990, the Soviet Union could have struck a deal with the United States, but it did not. Obviously any agreement among the Americans, West Germans, and Russians would have needed alliance approval, but in the political climate of 1990 it would have been possible to secure it. Even a written press release would have helped the Soviet cause. But Gorbachev did not secure one, and the window closed. Germany united and NATO began to move eastward.

68. Nataliya Gevorkyan, Natalya Timakova, Andrei Kolesnikov, and Vladimir Putin, First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia’s President Putin, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York, 2000), 81; 169. In making these remarks, Putin said that he was agreeing with an analysis offered by Kissinger. Putin also recalls Kissinger talking about how he (Kissinger) got his start in intelligence, just like Putin, 81.
