

# The NATO Enlargement Conundrum: Myth or Broken Promise?

Researching a 'NATO Promise' in the Negotiation Process on  
German Unification between the Soviet Union, the United States  
and the Federal Republic of Germany, 1990



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History punishes those who are late. But it has an even harsher punishment for those who try to stand in its way.

*Mikhail Gorbachev*

Epigraph is retrieved from: Maxim Korshunov, "Mikhail Gorbachev: I am against all walls," *Russia Beyond*, October 16, 2014, [https://www.rbth.com/international/2014/10/16/mikhail\\_gorbachev\\_i\\_am\\_against\\_all\\_walls\\_40673.html](https://www.rbth.com/international/2014/10/16/mikhail_gorbachev_i_am_against_all_walls_40673.html).

Cartoon on cover page is retrieved from: Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), image section between pages 302 and 303.

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## Preface

Before you lies my thesis, the crown product of my efforts this past year, partaking in the Master's programme International Relations in Historical Perspective at Utrecht University. It has been incredibly fulfilling to write an extensive academic piece that spans across my two principal areas of interest that have acted as a common thread throughout my studies: the Cold War and Russia. Writing this thesis has been a valuable and thought-provoking process, although, in all honesty, it was frustrating at times as well.

Therefore, I could not have completed writing this thesis without my solid support group, for whom I am very grateful. Firstly, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Christ Klep, for his valuable ideas, constructive feedback, and reassurances at times I needed them. Furthermore, I would like to thank my fellow students and friends, who were excellent brainstorming partners, for making the many hours in the library (and outside) much more enjoyable. Additionally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering moral support throughout the past months, and for the much-needed distraction they offered me. And finally, thanks to you, reader, for taking the time to look at the outcome of my hard work.

Susan Verstegen  
Utrecht, June 2018

## Summary

The negotiations on German unification, which took place in roughly the first half of 1990, were conducted by the FRG and the GDR, the U.S., the Soviet Union, France and Great-Britain. The central task of this process was to determine whether or not a unified Germany would join a military alliance, and if so, which one that would be. It was early in these negotiations that U.S. and FRG officials allegedly made a ‘NATO promise’ to the Soviet delegates, which, expressed on multiple occasions and in various phrasings, entailed that NATO would not expand eastwards.

Ever since, the ‘NATO promise’ has been a highly politicised and lively debated research subject topic. Scholars largely disagree on the nature and origins of the alleged NATO promise, and officials of both the Russian and Western sides adapted it into their political narratives. To shed light on why the ‘NATO promise’ has become such a controversial topic for those involved and researchers, this thesis extensively researches those dynamics, positions and other factors of influence in the negotiations on German reunification that relate to the alleged NATO promise.

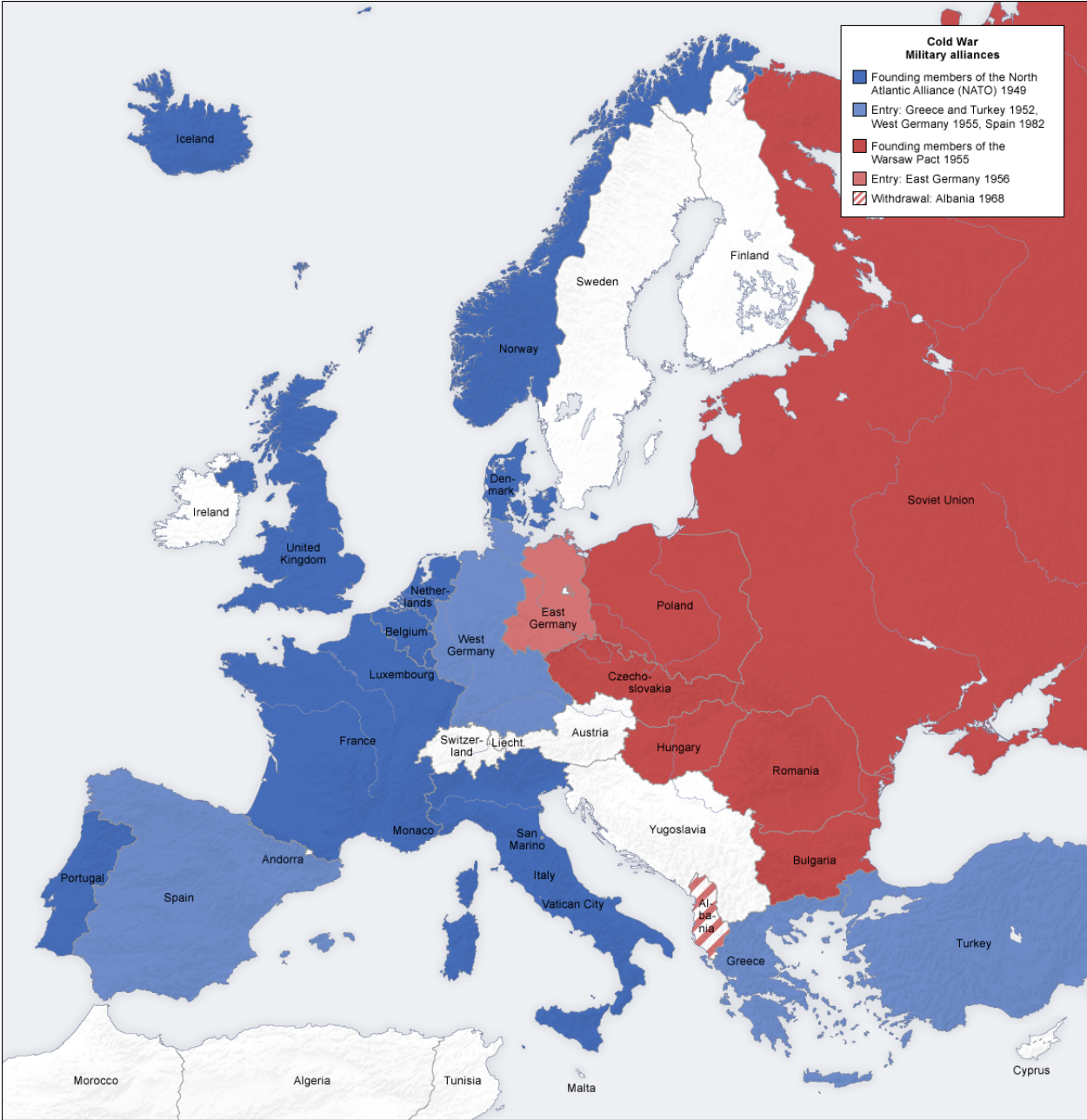
Through the study of a large number of primary sources – interpreted with theoretical concepts used as analytical tools – this thesis has deepened knowledge about three recurrent themes in the negotiations on German unification: historical arguments, dynamics of transition, and security considerations. Each theme explored positions, interests, and other factors of influence, on the individual, domestic, and international levels of analysis, thereby providing the thesis with a matrix-like analysis.

Although this thesis does not give a decisive answer whether or not a NATO promise was made, it offers valuable insights into the context in which it was allegedly made. Firstly, this thesis clarified that the Soviet decision-makers were occupied mainly with and paralysed by mounting domestic and transnational crises. Therefore, they were unable to either pay sufficient attention to the negotiations on German unification or to value Western offers correctly. Secondly, the U.S. and the FRG employed a joint negotiation strategy that deftly responded to the worries, weaknesses, and wishes of the Soviet delegation, to rouse the Soviet delegation in favour of NATO membership for a united Germany. The central aim of the FRG was the reunification of Germany, anchored within the NATO framework, while the primary objectives of the U.S. were to strengthen its strategic position in Europe and to end Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe. So, although they repeatedly claimed to do otherwise, the FRG and U.S. delegations played the Soviet Union to realise their own national goals. Therefore, the ‘NATO promise’ reflects the key problems at the end of the Cold War, as well as the positions and goals of the parties involved, which makes it a mirror subject for the broader context of ‘1990’.

## List of Abbreviations

|      |   |
|------|---|
| CDU  | Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (German Christian Democratic Union) |
| CIA  | Central Intelligence Agency   |
| CPSU | Communist Party of the Soviet Union   |
| CSCE | Commission for Security and Co-operation in Europe                              |
| FDP  | Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)                              |
| FPA  | Foreign Policy Analysis   |
| FRG  | Federal Republic of Germany   |
| GDR  | German Democratic Republic  |
| KGB  | Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)             |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation  |
| NSA  | National Security Advisor   |
| NSC  | National Security Council   |
| U.S. | United States   |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics   |
| WTO  | Warsaw Treaty Organisation  |

# Map of Military Alliances in Europe during the Cold War



Map retrieved from: "Cold war Europe military alliances map," *Wikimedia Commons*, last modified May 20, 2012, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/02/Cold\\_war\\_europe\\_military\\_alliances\\_map\\_en.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/02/Cold_war_europe_military_alliances_map_en.png).

## Introduction

I think it is obvious that NATO expansion ... represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? ... Where are these guarantees?<sup>1</sup>

At the 2007 edition of the annual Munich Security Conference, President Vladimir Putin introduced a new Russia. In addition to declaring the end of the unipolar world under the auspices of the United States, President Putin also expressed his dissatisfaction with the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). More specifically, Putin fired at the alleged breached promise that NATO would not expand in an eastern direction.

Much of the commotion revolves around several statements made in late January and the first days of February 1990, in the context of negotiations about German reunification – to which it is inextricably linked. On January 31, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), proclaimed during a speech in the city of Tutzing that “there will be no extension of NATO territory to the East, i.e. nearer the borders of the Soviet Union.”<sup>2</sup> Then, on February 9 and 10, the United States (U.S.) Secretary of State James A. Baker III, repeatedly made a similar statement. Baker gave “ironclad guarantees” to both Mikhail Gorbachev and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze that NATO would not move “one inch to the east.”<sup>3</sup> However, nothing of the sort was formally recorded in the *Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany* of September 1990.<sup>4</sup> In 1997, merely seven years after the West’s reassuring promises, NATO announced it would be expanding to Poland,

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<sup>1</sup> “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy (2007) by Vladimir Putin,” *Wikisource*, last modified March 4, 2017, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Speech\\_and\\_the\\_Following\\_Discussion\\_at\\_the\\_Munich\\_Conference\\_on\\_Security\\_Policy](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Speech_and_the_Following_Discussion_at_the_Munich_Conference_on_Security_Policy).

<sup>2</sup> Frank Elbe, “The Diplomatic Path to German Unity,” *Bulletin of the GHI* 46 (Spring 2010): 36.

<sup>3</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 6. Via Svetlana Savranskaya and Thomas Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” National Security Archive (hereafter: NSA), [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325679-Document-05-Memorandum-of-conversation-between](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325679-Document-05-Memorandum-of-conversation-between;); “Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 3. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325678-Document-04-Memorandum-of-conversation-between>.

<sup>4</sup> “September 12 Two-Plus-Four Ministerial in Moscow: Detailed account [includes text of the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany and Agreed Minute to the Treaty on the special military status of the GDR after unification],” (November 2, 1990). Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325703-Document-25>.



Hungary, and the Czech Republic.<sup>5</sup> Naturally, Moscow was outraged. Already in 1998, former U.S. diplomat George F. Kennan predicted that the “Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies.”<sup>6</sup> However, according to political scientist John Mearsheimer, Russia was not yet strong enough at the time to oppose NATO’s enlargement.<sup>7</sup>

As of 2018, after further expansion of NATO, the dispute does not show any signs of waning: the ‘promises’ of early 1990 continue to play on the minds of both Western and Russian officials. Whereas Russian officials and media report that NATO broke the promises made to the Soviet delegation in early 1990, NATO defends that such claims are illegitimate: “There is no record of any such decision having been taken by NATO. Personal assurances, from NATO leaders, cannot replace Alliance consensus and do not constitute formal NATO agreement.”<sup>8</sup> As stressed in his speeches in Munich and after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Putin uses the humiliation of the breached NATO promise as a legitimisation for Russia’s current foreign policy.<sup>9</sup> Russian officials, such as Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev, followed Putin’s trail and bitterly voiced their complaints, too.<sup>10</sup> Hubert Smeets, Dutch historian and research journalist, dubbed this the ‘Russian Versailles syndrome’.<sup>11</sup>

Evidently, the topic is subject to politicised history-writing – in which narrow, selective readings of history are translated for political use – as illustrated by the statements of Russian officials on the one hand, and NATO on the other.<sup>12</sup> Not only are such narratives invented to support political cases, but they exert influence on people’s worldviews as well. Hence,

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<sup>5</sup> “Member Countries,” *NATO*, last modified March 26, 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_52044.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52044.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, “Foreign Affairs; Now a Word From X,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/02/opinion/foreign-affairs-now-a-word-from-x.html>.

<sup>7</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 77 (2014): 78.

<sup>8</sup> “Claim: NATO promised at the time of German reunification that the Alliance would not expand to the East,” *NATO*, last modified February 28, 2018, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_111767.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm).

<sup>9</sup> “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy (2007) by Vladimir Putin,” *Wikisource*; “Vladimir Putin addressed State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin,” *Russian Foreign Ministry*, last modified March 18, 2014, [http://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/](http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/).

<sup>10</sup> “Interview with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev: ‘Oil and Gas is Our Drug’,” *Spiegel Online*, November 9, 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/spiegel-interview-with-russian-president-dmitry-medvedev-oil-and-gas-is-our-drug-a-660114.html>; “A Conversation with Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, last modified September 24, 2008, <https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-sergey-lavrov>.

<sup>11</sup> Hubert Smeets, “De NAVO brak zijn woord aan Rusland niet,” *NRC.nl*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/01/12/poetin-moet-niet-mekkeren-de-navo-brak-zijn-woord-niet-a1588169>.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Nünlist, Juhana Aunesluoma, and Benno Zogg, “The Road to the Charter of Paris: Historical Narratives and Lessons for the OSCE Today,” *OSCE Network* (2017), 7.

politicised historical narratives can shape the perspective of a state's population and, when reified, they could sustain for several generations. We can conclude, therefore, that the contradicting narratives vis-à-vis the NATO promise will continue to poison Russian-Western relations if the politicised narratives are not disproved.

Historians, armed with archival sources and existing scholarly knowledge, are, fortunately, apt to detangle this cobweb of contradictory narratives. Historical research is ideally suited to provide notes and nuances through the careful reconstruction of the past. It can thereby contribute to defusing the contemporary poisonous debate. However, current scholarly activity with regards to the NATO promise has yet to give a decisive answer: whether or not the West pledged not to expand NATO eastward has been a source of discussion amongst historians and international relations scholars for years. To fully comprehend the nature of this lively debate, it is important to elucidate its development and to identify the main points of dispute.

One of the first articles on the subject, by Michael MccGwire of Aberystwyth University, was published as early as 1998. MccGwire notes that Gorbachev was indeed assured that the West would not enlarge NATO to the East, thereby providing Russian officials with 'legitimate concerns' about the then-upcoming 1999 expansion of NATO.<sup>13</sup> James Goldgeier of George Washington University, however, disagrees. He argues that the NATO promise refers to the offer that no non-German NATO troops would be stationed in the East German territories.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Goldgeier believes that the NATO promise was not a pledge to abstain from enlarging NATO in Eastern Europe.

In 2009, the debate resurfaced due to the declassification of sources. Moreover, it was fuelled by repeating claims of Russian officials that NATO had broken its promise not to expand, for instance during Putin's Munich speech. Harvard University historian Mark Kramer, one of the leading scholars in the debate, denies that either formal or informal pledges were made with regards to limiting NATO expansion, conforming with the narrative of Western policymakers. Kramer stresses that "no Western leader ever offered any 'pledge' or 'commitment' or 'categorical assurances' about NATO's role vis-à-vis the rest of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (WTO) countries. Indeed, the issue never came up during the negotiations

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<sup>13</sup> Michael MccGwire, "NATO expansion: 'a policy error of historic importance'," *Review of International Studies* 24 (1998): 1285.

<sup>14</sup> James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2010), 16-17.

on German reunification, and the Soviet leaders at the time never claimed that it did.”<sup>15</sup> Mary Elise Sarotte, Professor of History at the University of Southern California, disagrees. She argues that there were, in fact, informal implications by U.S. and West German officials, but Gorbachev failed to ensure a formal deal.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Sarotte emphasises that the grand strategy of Washington and Bonn was to safeguard NATO’s enduring dominance, by misleading the Soviets with informal assurances and bribes.<sup>17</sup> Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin of the Department of International Affairs at Texas A&M University largely agrees with Sarotte. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, too, argues that the U.S. had a double agenda in February 1990: in his view, the U.S. was occupied with ensuring its pre-eminence in post-Cold War Europe.<sup>18</sup> He adds, however, that the issue of NATO expansion was “more than just a fleeting aspect of the negotiations,” and concludes that Russian officials are correct in claiming that NATO has breached its promise.<sup>19</sup> Kristiana Spohr, historian at the London School of Economics, based her research largely on German sources. She acknowledges that Western officials made informal commitments not to expand NATO towards Eastern Europe in February 1990, and emphasises that these assurances could have been interpreted by Soviet officials as being more consequential than has been recognised so far.<sup>20</sup> However, disagreeing with Itzkowitz Shiffrin and the contemporary Russian narrative, she summarises her view by stating that “if no *de jure* pledges were made, no pledges could have been broken or ‘betrayed’.”<sup>21</sup>

More sources were released by the National Security Archive in late 2017, causing a third wave of scholarly publications on the NATO promise. Through the analysis of these ‘new’ sources, Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton of George Washington University show that Gorbachev was indeed “led to believe” that NATO would not enlarge.<sup>22</sup> In particular, they point to the repetitive assurances of Western officials that they would take Soviet security concerns

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Kramer, “The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia,” *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2009): 41.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Elise Sarotte, “A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow About NATO Expansion,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 91.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Elise Sarotte, “Perpetuating U.S. Preeminence: The 1990 Deals to ‘Bribe the Soviets Out’ and Move NATO In,” *International Security* 35, no. 1 (2010): 136.

<sup>18</sup> Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, “Deal or No Deal?: The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion,” *International Security* 40, no. 4 (2016): 42.

<sup>19</sup> Itzkowitz Shiffrin, “Deal or No Deal?,” 11.

<sup>20</sup> Kristiana Spohr, “Precluded or Precedent-Setting? The ‘NATO Enlargement Question’ in the Triangular Bonn-Washington-Moscow Diplomacy of 1990–1991,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, no. 4 (2012): 48-49.

<sup>21</sup> Spohr, “Precluded or Precedent-Setting?,” 51.

<sup>22</sup> Svetlana Savranskaya and Thomas Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” NSA, last modified December 12, 2017, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early>.

into account and that NATO would not move eastward.<sup>23</sup> German political scientist Hannes Adomeit, who is connected to the Institute for Security Policy at the University of Kiel, strongly disagrees with Savranskaya and Blanton. Siding with Goldgeier, Adomeit contends that U.S. Secretary of State James Baker referred only to American troops on former East German soil when he spoke that NATO would move “not an inch eastward” – not of NATO expansion in general. Therefore, Adomeit argues, there were only guarantees about NATO troops within the borders of a united Germany.<sup>24</sup> Hubert Smeets critiques the research of Savranskaya and Blanton too: it is based on Western sources only. Smeets committed himself to the research of Soviet sources and found that NATO expansion was hardly talked about in official Soviet spheres, due to all-consuming domestic problems. Therefore, Smeets concludes that Gorbachev failed to secure the American pledges, thereby stressing that the idea that Moscow was deceived one-sided by the West is incorrect.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, three schools of thought with regards to NATO promise have emerged. The first argues that there were neither formal nor informal pledges that NATO would not expand to Eastern Europe, thus siding with the denying narrative of Western officials. The second school contends that Western officials did promise that NATO would not expand eastwards, thereby deceiving the Soviet delegation, which harmonises with the contemporary Russian narrative. The third, more nuanced school agrees that Western officials guaranteed no NATO expansion to Eastern Europe but partly blame the Soviet side as well for not ensuring a formal agreement.

So, the *status quaestionis* confirms that the topic of the NATO promise is subject to highly politicised history-writing, as well as a persistent disagreement amongst academics on the issue. Moreover, the discussion of the historiography revealed that much of the scholarly debate focuses on the semantics concerning the NATO promise. Although occasionally, such a semantical approach causes scholars to lose the crux of the debate out of sight. I, however, find that paying attention to the context is essential to any historical research. Without knowledge about the historical context, it is virtually impossible to grasp a research subject thoroughly. This is especially true when a study concerns the highly complex and defining context of a crucial moment in history, as is the case with the NATO promise. Therefore, deep knowledge of the negotiations on German unification and German membership of NATO – the context of

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<sup>23</sup> Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” 4.

<sup>24</sup> Hannes Adomeit, “NATO Osterweiterung: Gab es westliche Garantien?,” *Arbeitspapier Sicherheitspolitik* 3 (2018): 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> Hubert Smeets, “Rusland en de NAVO: woordbreuk of samenloop der omstandigheden?,” *Raam op Rusland*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.raamoprusland.nl/dossiers/geopolitiek/826-rusland-en-de-navo-regelrechte-woordbreuk-of-samenloop-der-omstandigheden>; Smeets, “De NAVO brak zijn woord aan Rusland niet.”

the alleged NATO promise – is indispensable for determining whether or not Western officials made a NATO promise. Moreover, the negotiation process on German reunification can be seen as a ‘mirror subject’ for the end of the Cold War: it neatly reflects the key problems that this disruptive series of events caused, as well as the main parties’ views and positions.

Consequently, an analysis of the alleged NATO promise that focuses less on semantics but zooms out instead can provide valuable insights into the NATO promise, as well as the negotiation process *an sich* and the broader dynamics of ‘1990’. Therefore, this thesis extensively researches those dynamics, positions and other factors of influence in the negotiations on German reunification that relate to the alleged NATO promise, in order to shed light on why the ‘NATO promise’ has become such a controversial topic for those involved and researchers. Whether or not (in the author’s opinion) a no-NATO enlargement pledge was actually made, will be discussed in the epilogue.

This analysis will be multi-dimensional. On one axis, this thesis encompasses themes in the negotiation process on German unification. A thematical approach transcends the descriptive level, allowing for an analysis that zooms out and maps the positions and interests of the actors involved. Through the preliminary research on a large number of primary sources about the negotiations on German reunification – which consisted of reading and analysing inter alia memoranda, records, interviews and diary entries – I found that there were three recurring themes in the argumentation employed by the delegations during the negotiations: ‘historical arguments’, ‘dynamics of transition’, and ‘security considerations’. The recurrence of these key themes indicates their apparent relevance to those involved. Therefore, the three themes can be considered ‘vessels’ of the contextual dynamics, positions of actors, and other factors of influence relevant to the alleged NATO promise. Each key theme will be discussed in a separate chapter, where it is further divided into subthemes – thereby providing the core structure of this thesis – and elaborated on with both academic literature and a wide range of primary sources relevant to the subject.<sup>26</sup> The latter consists of a series of recently declassified government sources of the National Security Archive, memoirs and diaries, interviews, and additional sources of official nature.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, suitable theoretical concepts will be used as analytical tools in each chapter to provide an additional explanation to the theme discussed.

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<sup>26</sup> I assigned topics in the negotiation process to the theme I thought was best suitable. However, the problem remains that this categorisation is a subjective process. Therefore, throughout this thesis, one could argue on several occasions that a particular topic could have also fitted into another thematical chapter than the chapter to which I assigned it.

<sup>27</sup> In this thesis, I assume that the content of the primary sources is truthful, unless I have reason to believe otherwise.

On the other axis, this thesis addresses three levels of analysis in each chapter: the relevant domestic and international factors of influence will be discussed, as well as those on the individual level. The analysis of actors will be limited to (individuals from) the Soviet Union, the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>28</sup> This matrix-type analysis is in itself an addition to the historiography on the NATO promise, which is predominantly arranged chronologically.

This research will be embedded in the academic school of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). FPA developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and it studies the non-domestic relations and activities of states, based on the belief that “all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in the human decision makers acting singly or in groups.”<sup>29</sup> FPA contends that only humans have agency, and therefore, FPA can be characterised as an actor-specific theory.<sup>30</sup> FPA scholars try to identify those variables that determine the behaviour of policymakers, including the environment in which these humans find themselves.<sup>31</sup> A thorough FPA study, therefore, encompasses not only the worldviews of particular actors, but it also pays attention to the domestic and international environments with which they interact.<sup>32</sup> Importantly, FPA does not prescribe a particular international relations theory.<sup>33</sup> Instead, it merely provides a lens – ‘foreign policy decisions are made by individuals who are influenced by the domestic and international context in which they move’ – through which historical research can be conducted. In this thesis, FPA’s central premise will be used merely as a point of departure to which other theories and primary source analysis can be applied. Importantly, it is not the goal of this thesis to prove the value of any theoretical concept. Finally, it should be emphasised that this thesis does not aim to judge the political or moral merits of NATO expansion: it is above all meant to unravel the context and origins of the alleged NATO promise.

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<sup>28</sup> These states have been selected due to their indispensability for the negotiation process on German unification. Although Great Britain and France were official players in the negotiations, their influence on the course of events was minimal. Therefore, I chose not to analyse Great Britain and France. This also allowed me to research the Soviet Union, the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany more in-depth.

<sup>29</sup> Valerie M. Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 16; Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 252-253; Valerie M. Hudson, “Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1 (2005): 1.

<sup>30</sup> Hudson, “Foreign Policy Analysis,” 1-3.

<sup>31</sup> James N. Rosenau, *The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy*, rev. ed. (London: Frances Printer Publishers, 1980), 117; Howard H. Lentner, *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Comparative and Conceptual Approach* (Columbus, OH: Bell & Howell Company, 1974), 11.

<sup>32</sup> Lentner, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 5-7.

<sup>33</sup> Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, 252.

## Chapter I            The NATO Promise: A Chronology of Events

To comprehend the nature of the negotiations regarding the alleged NATO promise, contextualisation is a necessary ingredient. Therefore, this chapter will provide a chronological overview of the most important episodes and events during the negotiations on German reunification. Moreover, it will introduce the main actors and lay out their respective views and initial positions.

### *Mauerfall: The Beginning*

On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. Due to the vast impact of this disruptive event, a series of transformative processes was set in motion. This included the reunification of the two Germanies, which were at that point members of opposing military alliances: the FRG was a NATO member, while the German Democratic Republic (GDR) belonged to the WTO.<sup>34</sup> The Chancellor of the FRG, Helmut Kohl, already presented a ten-point plan for reunification in late November. As for future European security, Kohl anticipated that the Commission for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) should remain “part of the heart of the pan-European architecture,” while leaving NATO out of this plan.<sup>35</sup> In the very same week, Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, proposed his plan for the future of Europe. Gorbachev, who was committed to overcoming the Cold War through cooperation with the West, repeated his views of a ‘common European home’.<sup>36</sup> Importantly, this vision included that there would be tighter cooperation between the WTO and NATO, which would both transform from military to political organisations. Gorbachev remained passionate about this idea throughout the negotiation process, as became clear in June 1990, when he continued advocating that the NATO and WTO countries should “make the transition from confrontation to cooperation.”<sup>37</sup> This all would occur within the framework of the CSCE, which Gorbachev envisioned to become the main structure of European security. Moreover, the common

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<sup>34</sup> See map of military alliances in Europe during the Cold War on page 7.

<sup>35</sup> Nünlist, Aunesluoma, and Zogg, “The Road to the Charter of Paris,” 13.

As of 1 January, 1995, the Commission for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) changed its name into the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the name it still bears in 2018. See: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/52527>.

<sup>36</sup> William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 542.

<sup>37</sup> “Letter from Mr. Powell (N. 10) to Mr. Wall: Thatcher-Gorbachev memorandum of conversation,” (June 8, 1990), 3. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325699-Document-22-Letter-from-Mr-Powell-N-10-to-Mr>.

European home encompassed more economic cooperation within the European continent, disarmament, and respect for human rights based on the Helsinki Accords of 1975.<sup>38</sup> All of this occurred within the larger ‘Gorbachev revolution’ that also included the domestic policies of *glasnost* (‘openness’) and *perestroika* (‘reforms’), which essentially aimed at turning the Soviet Union into a social democracy.<sup>39</sup> At the ensuing Malta Conference of 2 and 3 December, U.S. President George H.W. Bush, who was in the first year of his first term as President, appeared open to rapprochement by declaring his commitment to overcoming military tensions and the division of Europe.<sup>40</sup>

### *An Eventful Winter*

On January 26, 1990, a small group of CPSU officials met in Gorbachev’s office to discuss the Soviet strategy regarding the German question. Gorbachev heralded his optimistic views and claimed that “[t]he main thing on which no one should count is that a united Germany will join NATO. The presence of our troops will not allow this.”<sup>41</sup> Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze advised that the Soviet Union should not be included in a discussion about German reunification, and instead should wait for the GDR to come forward with an initiative.<sup>42</sup> In general, the Kremlin was not unequivocal about the German question. Gorbachev acknowledged the emotional desire for the German nation to reunite: years later he explained he thought it “morally wrong” to deny German unity and politically incompatible with *perestroika*.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, however, the Soviets felt intimidated by German unity. Shevardnadze’s interpreter Teimuraz Stepanov-Mamaladze poetically wrote in his diary that “[t]he subject of German unity is not at all a bucolic sheep in the skies of the world. For some, it is a terrible thunder cloud, and for us it is an altogether thick fog on the horizon.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Marie-Pierre Rey, “‘Europe is our Common Home’: A study of Gorbachev’s diplomatic concept,” *Cold War History* 4, no. 2 (2004): 39-40, 56; Nünlist, Aunesluoma, and Zogg, “The Road to the Charter of Paris,” 12.

<sup>39</sup> Archie Brown, “The Gorbachev revolution and the end of the Cold War,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume III: Endings*, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 244-245.

<sup>40</sup> Kristina Spohr and David Reynolds, eds., *Transcending the Cold War: Summits, Statecraft, and the Dissolution of Bipolarity in Europe, 1970-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 210.

<sup>41</sup> “Discussion of the German Question at a Private Meeting in the Office of the CPSU CC General Secretary,” (January 26, 1990). Cold War International History Project (hereafter: CWIHP), History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Wilson Centre, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121964>.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times*, 544.

<sup>44</sup> “Teimuraz Stepanov-Mamaladze diary,” (February 12, 1990), 1. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325685-Document-10-02-Teimuraz-Stepanov-Mamaladze-diary>.



Only five days after his initial reading of the German situation, Gorbachev was publicly proven wrong. On January 31, FRG Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher delivered a speech in Tutzing, Bavaria, on the future relations between a unified Germany and NATO. According to a telegram from the U.S. Embassy in Bonn to Secretary of State James Baker, Genscher was willing to take into account the Soviets, as he insisted that the German reunification should not lead to an “impairment of Soviet security interests” and that NATO should refrain from an “expansion of its territory towards the east, i.e. moving it closer to the Soviet borders.”<sup>45</sup> According to Genscher’s aides, however, Genscher worked on the text mainly alone and did not confer with the Chancellery before delivering the speech.<sup>46</sup> In part, this was caused by the fact that the relationship between Genscher and Kohl was unravelling due to the upcoming first free elections in East Germany, in which Kohl’s Christian democratic party (CDU) and Genscher’s liberal party (FDP) were competing against each other.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, on February 2, Genscher met with Baker in Washington, and the latter accepted the ‘Tutzing formulation’. Brent Scowcroft, Bush’s National Security Advisor (NSA), noted in his memoirs that Baker perhaps not had realised the problems this acceptance created for NATO.<sup>48</sup> Still, the two men declared to the world media that they were “in full agreement” and repeated that NATO indeed had “no intention to extend the NATO area of defense and security to the East.”<sup>49</sup>

It soon became clear that German unification would be a fast-track operation. A week later, on February 9 and 10, Soviet, West German and American delegations met in Moscow for a set of bilateral meetings. Most controversial was the meeting between Baker and his Soviet counterpart Eduard Shevardnadze on February 9, in which Baker said the following:

[A] Germany that is firmly anchored in a changed NATO, by that I mean a NATO that is far less of military organization, much more of a political one, would have no need for independent capability. There would, of course, have to be iron-clad guarantees that NATO’s jurisdiction or forces would

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<sup>45</sup> “U.S. Embassy Bonn Confidential Cable to Secretary of State on the speech of the German Foreign Minister: Genscher Outlines His Vision of a New European Architecture,” (February 1, 1990), 4. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325675-Document-01-U-S-Embassy-Bonn-Confidential-Cable>.

<sup>46</sup> Spohr, “Precluded or Precedent-Setting?,” 13.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Elise Sarotte, “Not One Inch Eastward? Bush, Baker, Kohl, Genscher, Gorbachev, and the Origin of Russian Resentment toward NATO Enlargement in February 1990,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 1 (2010): 122.

<sup>48</sup> George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 237.

<sup>49</sup> Spohr and Reynolds, *Transcending the Cold War*, 212.

not move eastward. And this would have to be done in a manner that would satisfy Germany's neighbors to the east.<sup>50</sup>

It should be noted that Baker, a schooled lawyer, specified the Tutzing formulation of 'NATO territory' to 'NATO jurisdiction' – which was nevertheless immediately changed back into 'territory', as the National Security Council (NSC) staff thought Baker's wording was "impractical in military-strategic terms and too restrictive for further diplomatic bargaining."<sup>51</sup> Surprisingly, however, Shevardnadze did not respond to Baker's offer and quickly changed topics. Gorbachev acted likewise in his meeting with Baker this same day. Again, Baker offered the narrower formulation by posing that there would be no "extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east."<sup>52</sup> After being offered the same phrasing twice more, Gorbachev finally responded that he would discuss it with his colleagues at the Kremlin. He added that "[i]t goes without saying that a broadening of the NATO zone is not acceptable," to which Baker consented.<sup>53</sup> In a letter Baker sent to Kohl the following day, Baker elaborated on Gorbachev's remarks, and speculated that those implied that "NATO in its current zone might be acceptable."<sup>54</sup> Taking this into account for his meeting with Gorbachev that very same day, Kohl said to the Soviet leader that NATO should not expand its scope.<sup>55</sup> Gorbachev, again, failed to secure this offer, and the Soviet position remained unclear to the West. Sarotte provides a possible explanation why it had not occurred to Gorbachev to put the Western promises in writing, by noting that he emerged from a political culture "in which the word of a leader overruled the law."<sup>56</sup>

During a conference of NATO and WTO foreign ministers in Ottawa several days later, another key moment occurred. At the so-called Open Skies conference, the foreign ministers of the Four Power countries (the U.S., the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and France) agreed to start a negotiation process for German reunification, which would take the form of a '2 + 4'

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<sup>50</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow," (February 9, 1990), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Spohr, "Precluded or Precedent-Setting?," 24.

<sup>52</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow," (February 9, 1990), 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>54</sup> "Letter from James Baker to Helmut Kohl," (February 10, 1990), 2. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard," <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325682-Document-08-Letter-from-James-Baker-to-Helmut-Kohl>.

<sup>55</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl," (February 10, 1990), 2. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard," <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325683-Document-09-Memorandum-of-conversation-between>.

<sup>56</sup> Sarotte, "Not One Inch Eastward?," 128.

formation.<sup>57</sup> In the 2 + 4 framework, the two Germanies would decide on the internal matters of unification, such as which alliance to join, while the Four Powers formally focused on external matters – a distinction that in practice, of course, faded.

### *Finding Common Ground*

Before these 2 + 4 conferences took place, a West German delegation visited Camp David, the President's country retreat, in late February 1990. According to the memoirs of President Bush, the goals for the Camp David meetings "were simple: to coordinate the path to unification."<sup>58</sup> This objective was achieved, as the West German and U.S. delegations agreed on a carefully formulated position on Bush's terms. From late February onwards, the FRG and the U.S. would strive together to anchor a unified Germany as a full member of NATO, although they were willing to accept a special military status for the GDR territory.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the Chancellor and the President, who had become friendly at this point, decided on a coordinated strategy to reach this goal. As the weakened Soviet Union found itself in the midst of a dismal economic situation, they argued, Moscow could be persuaded if the FRG provided them with cash.<sup>60</sup> They assessed the situation well. Indeed, over the course of 1990, the Soviet economy had dropped to negative growth in all the indexes. Most importantly, the agricultural output went down 3 per cent, and the industrial production dropped 5 per cent.<sup>61</sup> This put Gorbachev in dire need of economic support, which Kohl agreed to provide. The latter kept his word and donated over fifteen billion Deutschmarks to the Soviet Union over the following months.<sup>62</sup>

At the Camp David meeting of late February, Baker gave valuable insight into one of the reasons why the U.S. favoured full NATO membership for a united Germany. He explained to Kohl that "NATO is the *raison d'être* for keeping U.S. forces in Europe ... We couldn't have U.S. forces in Europe on the soil of a non-full member of NATO."<sup>63</sup> As the U.S. forces had their military bases in the FRG, NATO membership for a unified Germany was the only

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<sup>57</sup> Elbe, "The Diplomatic Path to German Unity," 39-40.

<sup>58</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 250.

<sup>59</sup> Sarotte, "Not One Inch Eastward?," 135.

<sup>60</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush at Camp David," (February 24, 1990), 8-10. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard," <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325690-Document-13-Memorandum-of-Conversation-between>.

<sup>61</sup> Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994), 418-419.

<sup>62</sup> Sarotte, "A Broken Promise?," 96.

<sup>63</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush at Camp David," (February 24, 1990), 8.

possibility for the U.S. to maintain their military presence on the European continent, Scowcroft explained later in his memoirs, thereby sustaining its position as a European power.<sup>64</sup>

After the first free elections in the GDR on March 18, that accounted for an overwhelming support for quick reunification, the effort for a unified Germany gathered strength.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, the Soviet Union continued to oppose NATO membership for a reunified Germany and, instead, pushed for a pan-European security structure. For two months the Soviets maintained this position. Then, in a meeting with the U.S. delegation in Washington on May 31, Gorbachev unexpectedly conceded. It is likely that Baker had placated Gorbachev in their meeting on May 18, when Baker offered his ‘Nine Points’. These included developing the CSCE into a permanent European institution and allowing Soviet troops to remain in the GDR for a transition period.<sup>66</sup> Either way, on May 31, Gorbachev recognised that the Helsinki Final Act stated that all states have the right to choose their own alliances, including a unified Germany.<sup>67</sup><sup>68</sup> Gorbachev’s significant concession astonished the U.S. delegation, but also upset the Soviet delegation, creating, as Bush recalled, “an unbelievable scene, the likes of which none of us had ever seen before – virtually open rebellion against a Soviet leader.”<sup>69</sup> Baker, too, remarked later that it was an unusual episode, of which Gorbachev might not have understood the significance.<sup>70</sup> In an interview years later, Anatoly Chernyaev, Gorbachev’s foreign policy advisor, explained that “Baker’s Nine Points” were the reason why Gorbachev eventually

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<sup>64</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 230-231; “U.S. State Department, Two Plus Four: Advantages, Possible Concerns and Rebuttal Points,” (February 21, 1990), 1. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325687-Document-11-U-S-State-Department-Two-Plus-Four>.

<sup>65</sup> Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times*, 548.

<sup>66</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 21-23. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325695-Document-18-Record-of-conversation-between>.

<sup>67</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.,” (May 31, 1990), 9. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325698-Document-21-Record-of-conversation-between>.

<sup>68</sup> The Helsinki Final Act was the conclusion of the founding CSCE conference in 1975, which was intended to ameliorate East-West relations. Among other subjects, the Final Act importantly recorded the sovereignty of states – and the Soviet Union had been one of its first signatories.

<sup>69</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 282-283.

<sup>70</sup> “James A. Baker III Oral History (2011), White House Chief of Staff; Secretary of State,” (March 17, 2011), 31. George H. W. Bush Oral History Project (hereafter: BOHP), Miller Center, University of Virginia, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/james-baker-iii-oral-history-2011-white-house-chief>.

accepted full German membership in NATO.<sup>71</sup> Still, it remained unclear what Gorbachev's unofficial acknowledgement would mean in practice.<sup>72</sup>

### *Concluding the German Question*

For the West, this indicated that the end of the negotiations was near. Meanwhile, Gorbachev was occupied with the 28<sup>th</sup> CPSU Party Congress in early July, in which he faced considerable opposition. Gorbachev was essentially torn between his vision of a common European home on the one hand and the domestic opposition by communist hard-liners and negative public opinion on the other.<sup>73</sup> Despite this, Gorbachev was the re-elected party leader.<sup>74</sup> This was caused not in the least by NATO's London Declaration, that was issued during the CPSU Party Congress. During the London Summit on July 5, NATO members had altered the alliance's military strategy, declared that they viewed the Soviet Union no longer as a threat, and pledged their commitment to politically cooperate with Warsaw Pact members – which helped calm the Soviet opposition.<sup>75</sup> Now both parties had proved their willingness to work on a solution for the Germany-in-NATO question.

The progressing rapprochement was made to a successful close during the Kohl-Gorbachev Caucasus summit of mid-July. Kohl managed to obtain Moscow's written affirmation of Germany's full sovereignty and right to choose its alliance. In practice, this meant that Gorbachev agreed to full NATO membership for a united Germany.<sup>76</sup> In exchange, the men decided on a transition period of three or four years, during which a unified Germany would legally be a NATO member, but Soviet troops would remain in the GDR.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, no nuclear weapons and no non-German troops were allowed to be stationed on former GDR territory after the Red Army had left.<sup>78</sup> All the while, further NATO expansion was left undiscussed. According to Mark Kramer and Hubert Smeets, declassified Soviet records

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<sup>71</sup> Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times*, 550.

<sup>72</sup> “‘Briefing Allies on Washington Summit,’ U.S. Department of State Cable,” (June 15, 1990), in *The Last Superpower Summits: Gorbachev, Reagan and Bush: Conversations that Ended the Cold War*, eds. Svetlana Savranskaya and Thomas Blanton (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 696.

<sup>73</sup> Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times*, 545.

<sup>74</sup> Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times*, 519-521; Spohr and Reynolds, *Transcending the Cold War*, 216.

<sup>75</sup> “Opening Statement to the NATO Summit Meeting. Speech by Secretary General, Manfred Wörner,” (July 5, 1990). Speeches & Transcripts, Newsroom, NATO, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_23718.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_23718.htm?selectedLocale=en); Spohr, “Precluded or Precedent-Setting?,” 46.

<sup>76</sup> Spohr and Reynolds, *Transcending the Cold War*, 204.

<sup>77</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, Moscow (Excerpts),” (July 15, 1990), 5-6. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325700-Document-23-Record-of-Conversation-between>.

<sup>78</sup> Spohr and Reynolds, *Transcending the Cold War*, 221.

demonstrate that the question of possible NATO expansion towards the east was not even brought up once by any Soviet official after the CPSU meeting of January 26, 1990.<sup>79</sup> This assertion has been confirmed in recent interviews with both Gorbachev and Shevardnadze.<sup>80</sup>

The Caucasus summit had made history: it paved the way for the Four Powers and the two Germanies to sign the *Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany* on September 12. The FRG and the GDR would officially reunite on October 3, 1990, and join NATO as a whole. There had finally come an end to the turbulent period in which, as Gorbachev's advisor Valentin Falin summarised, "history compressed one hundred years into one hundred days."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Kramer, "Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge," 51; Smeets, "Rusland en de NAVO"; Hubert Smeets, *De Wraak van Poetin* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2016), 108.

<sup>80</sup> "Interview with Eduard Shevardnadze: 'We Couldn't Believe that the Warsaw Pact Could Be Dissolved'," *Spiegel Online*, November 26, 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/interview-with-eduard-shevardnadze-we-couldn-t-believe-that-the-warsaw-pact-could-be-dissolved-a-663595.html>; Maxim Korshunov, "Mikhail Gorbachev: I am against all walls," *Russia Beyond*, October 16, 2014, [https://www.rbth.com/international/2014/10/16/mikhail\\_gorbachev\\_i\\_am\\_against\\_all\\_walls\\_40673.html](https://www.rbth.com/international/2014/10/16/mikhail_gorbachev_i_am_against_all_walls_40673.html).

<sup>81</sup> Smeets, "De NAVO brak zijn woord aan Rusland niet."

## Chapter II Theme: Historical Arguments

The first theme to be discussed addresses the vast array of historical arguments employed in the negotiations concerning the German unification and the role of NATO therein. During this process, many of the decision-makers frequently referred to historical phenomena to underpin their case. In other words, historical events were used as arguments in the negotiations. Additionally, there was a shared fear that recent history would repeat itself. This attention for the past contributed to a large number of historical references throughout the negotiations on German unification. The most referred to historical subjects concerned Germany's violent past and the events of the twentieth century. In this first thematical chapter, these two subthemes will be discussed in-depth.

It appeared, moreover, that the decision-makers involved in the negotiations communicated a sense of historical national identities. Throughout this chapter, primary sources will be explained by existing scholarly knowledge on the national identities of the United States, (West) Germany and the Soviet Union. Anthony D. Smith, the eminent British historical sociologist, states that one of the fundamental features of Western national identities is the presence of shared historical memories, myths, symbols and traditions.<sup>82</sup> London University College historian Mary Fulbrook agrees and adds that a collective national identity will be stronger if there is either a widespread sense of historical legacy or a shared destiny present in the community.<sup>83</sup> We can conclude, therefore, that national identity has its roots at least partly in the memory of a shared history. Moreover, a national identity strongly influences the choices – for instance in the socio-political and interstate spheres – made by political actors, as both Smith and Ronald Krebs, Professor of Political Science at the University of Minnesota, explain.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, the behaviour of the actors in the negotiations about German unification can be explained partially by their respective national historical identities.

### *Germany's Violent Past*

Throughout the negotiations about German unification in the first half of 1990, the delegates involved made numerous references towards the history of the German nation.<sup>85</sup> Mostly, these

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<sup>82</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 11, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>84</sup> Ronald R. Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 14; Smith, *National Identity*, 16-17.

<sup>85</sup> In this chapter, the historical grounds of the perceived threat of a united Germany will be discussed. The perceived threats to European security, caused by German reunification, will be addressed in-depth in Chapter IV: Security Considerations.

related to the large-scale violence that was inextricably linked to Germany's recent history, of which the First and Second World War can be viewed as the most horrid examples.

Perhaps unexpectedly, many of the negative references towards the violent German past came from the West German officials. FRG Chancellor Helmut Kohl relatively often emphasised that a reunited Germany should learn from its history. Therefore, he argued, a German state should not be neutral, but constrained by an alliance structure instead. This view is articulated in his memoirs, in which he describes that he believed that "a neutralization with the Federal Government is not enforceable. This would also be a historical stupidity. History has shown that it was a mistake to put Germany under a special status after 1918."<sup>86</sup> The other main West German actor in the negotiations, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, was critical of German history too. During his Tutzing speech, Genscher disapproved of the German 'Sonderweg' – the idea that Germany followed a special path of development towards modernity because of its peculiarities. In Tutzing, he stated that "the Germans, in pursuing their goal of national unity, are not following their own special path ('Sonderweg'), but are fully aware of their European responsibility."<sup>87</sup> Therefore, largely because of Germany's turbulent past, the general West German stance was that a reunified Germany should be anchored in NATO structures.

The apologetic language used by West German officials fits neatly into the German national identity as elaborated on in scholarly publications. According to Harvard historian Charles S. Maier, the West German people are generally aware of their national moral responsibility for the Nazi past, and moreover, find it extremely important to pay respect to this history.<sup>88</sup> Fulbrook agrees and describes that the West Germans committed themselves to "an almost ritualized incorporation of national guilt in the official re-presentation of the past" during the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>89</sup> She explains that people in the FRG lived according to a "post-1945 Sonderweg," in which Germans were not unique in their path to modernity, but in which Germans uniquely had to feel ashamed of their nation instead.<sup>90</sup> The primary sources discussed above prove that Genscher and Kohl, who publicly carried the burden of the German

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<sup>86</sup> Helmut Kohl, *Erinnerungen, 1982-1990* (Munich: Droemer, 2005), 1065. My translation. Original text: "Mit Nachdruck stellte ich fest, dass eine Neutralisierung mit der Bundesregierung nicht durchsetzbar sei. Dies wäre darüber hinaus eine historische Dummheit. Die Geschichte habe gezeigt, dass es ein Fehler gewesen sei, Deutschland nach 1918 unter einen Sonderstatus zu stellen."

<sup>87</sup> "U.S. Embassy Bonn Confidential Cable to Secretary of State on the speech of the German Foreign Minister: Genscher Outlines His Vision of a New European Architecture," (February 1, 1990), 8.

<sup>88</sup> Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 11.

<sup>89</sup> Fulbrook, *German National Identity*, 36.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.



history, are perfect examples of Fulbrook's notions. Fulbrook also remarks that Kohl was domestically in the forefront of the conservative movement who felt that it might be time for Germany to cease feeling ashamed of itself and to re-appropriate the past.<sup>91</sup> Christian Wicke, Assistant Professor of Political History at Utrecht University, confirms this view. He emphasises Kohl's efforts to steer towards a normalisation of the German nation, in which Germany is no longer viewed as a threat.<sup>92</sup> However, this conservative tendency did not resonate in Kohl's language with international parties during the negotiations on German reunification, in which public penance dominated instead.

Naturally, non-German officials were aware of the violent German history too. In the CPSU meeting of January 26, Vladimir Kryuchkov, head of the Soviet intelligence service KGB ('Committee on State Security'), stated that the "[Soviet] people are afraid that Germany will become a threat again."<sup>93</sup> Gorbachev's advisor on Germany, Valentin Falin, was cautious of a resurgent Germany as well. Specifically, he warned against a replay of Versailles – referring to the 1919 Treaty of Versailles that formally concluded the First World War and lay the foundation for the Second World War due to German grievances about their severe punishment. Therefore, Falin advised Gorbachev to negotiate in a way "that is non-discriminating for the Germans, and thus to avoid the 'Versailles syndrome'."<sup>94</sup> Gorbachev, too, acknowledged the dangers of a 'new Versailles'. He, however, pointed to the failure of the Versailles treaty to prevent the Germans from re-arming in the years thereafter. Moreover, he emphasised that a "unified Germany has always been a breeding ground for chauvinism and anti-semitism."<sup>95</sup> Therefore, Gorbachev concluded in this meeting with Baker on February 9 that Germany should be "contained within European structures."<sup>96</sup> On the following day, it became clear that Gorbachev aimed at a political structure: the Soviet leader said to Kohl that he envisioned a non-neutral Germany outside military formations, as he believed this status

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>92</sup> Christian Wicke, *Helmut Kohl's Quest for Normality: His Representation of the German Nation and Himself* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 115, 189-190, 215.

<sup>93</sup> "Discussion of the German Question at a Private Meeting in the Office of the CPSU CC General Secretary," (January 26, 1990).

<sup>94</sup> "Valentin Falin Memorandum to Mikhail Gorbachev (Excerpts)," (April 18, 1990), 2. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard," <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325693-Document-16-Valentin-Falin-Memorandum-to-Mikhail>.

<sup>95</sup> "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow (Excerpts)," (February 9, 1990), 8. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard," <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325680-Document-06-Record-of-conversation-between>.

<sup>96</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow," (February 9, 1990), 9.

would not humiliate the Germans.<sup>97</sup> This statement should be set against Gorbachev's idea of a common European home. Still, the Soviet delegation did not appear to share a position on Germany's future alliance status: Kryuchkov suggested this very same week that a unified Germany could be neutral, a member of NATO, or a member of the WTO.<sup>98</sup>

Contrarily, the U.S. officials did share a position. Robert Gates, director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), proved exemplary of this U.S. position in his responses to Kryuchkov's suggestions. Gates said that alignment of a united Germany with the Warsaw Pact was impossible and added that "[a] neutral Germany would suffer from the same insecurities and uncertainties regarding its security that Germany had experienced before World War I."<sup>99</sup> Naturally, Gates argued that the third option, membership in NATO, would provide for a secure Germany integrated into Western Europe.<sup>100</sup>

Secretary of State Baker, too, was sceptical about the neutrality of a united Germany but he trusted a Germany that would be anchored in NATO. In the important meeting with his Soviet counterpart Shevardnadze on February 9, Baker stated that "[it is] precisely the danger of a neutral Germany becoming militaristic that should be of concern."<sup>101</sup> To prevent this from happening, Baker argued that there would be much less of a chance of an aggressive, militaristic Germany under the approach that would anchor Germany in Western institutions.<sup>102</sup> At the end of May, he repeated the U.S. vision to Gorbachev, by stating that "unless Germany is solidly rooted in European institutions, conditions could arise to repeat the past."<sup>103</sup>

President Bush, sometimes followed a slightly different negotiating technique, by saying that he trusted a united Germany, despite its violent history.<sup>104</sup> However, he too warned against "[singling] out Germany in a way which threatens to make history repeat itself."<sup>105</sup> Neatly summarising the U.S. position, Bush said the following during the May 31 conversation:

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<sup>97</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl," (February 10, 1990), 3.

<sup>98</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Robert Gates and Vladimir Kryuchkov in Moscow," (February 9, 1990), 10. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard," <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325681-Document-07-Memorandum-of-conversation-between>.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow," (February 9, 1990), 8.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>103</sup> "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow," (May 18, 1990), 20.

<sup>104</sup> "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush," (July 17, 1990), 611. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard," <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325701-Document-24-Memorandum-of-Telephone-Conversation>.

<sup>105</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, Bush-Gorbachev, First Private Meeting, Washington, 10:54 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.," (May 31, 1990), in *The Last Superpower Summits*, Savranskaya and Blanton, 661.

“[M]istrust oriented toward the past is an especially bad adviser ... [W]e all in the West are united in one concern: the main danger lies in separating Germany from the community of democratic states, in trying to impose some special status and humiliating conditions on her. It is precisely this kind of development of events that could lead to a revival of German militarism and revanchism.”<sup>106</sup>

### *The Legacy of the Twentieth Century*

The second category of historical arguments that appeared in the negotiations on German unification were references to the First World War, the Second World War and the interbellum, which all took place in the first half of the twentieth century. To emphasise the interdependence of these events, the period of 1914-1945 is sometimes referred to as the European Civil War.

In general, the negotiations were coloured by the fear that history would repeat itself and that Europe would slip back into violence. This was not limited to a resurgence of a violent Germany, discussed in the previous paragraph, but to Europe as a whole as well. These fears were present from the outset of the negotiations, as illustrated by NATO Secretary-General Manfred Wörner, who warned Bush in early February that, if Germany were a neutral power, the “old Pandora’s box of competition and rivalry in Europe would be reopened.”<sup>107</sup> To prevent yet another catastrophe, the negotiating parties agreed that Europe should enter a new age of increased stability.<sup>108</sup>

Firstly, the U.S. agreed to take its part in this process. National Security Advisor Scowcroft recalled in his memoirs that the White House realised it had to take its responsibility to prevent a repetition of the turmoil that had beset Europe in the twentieth century and wrote that “American isolationism had played its part in those tragedies. The lesson we drew from this bloody history was that the United States had to continue to play a significant role in European security.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, as Scowcroft argued, the U.S. believed it could improve the situation in Europe in 1990. Therefore, throughout the 1990 negotiations, U.S. officials repeatedly argued that U.S. troops in Germany would enhance continental stability. For instance, during his meeting with Gorbachev on February 9, Baker bluntly stated that he

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<sup>106</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.,” (May 31, 1990), 2.

<sup>107</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 242.

<sup>108</sup> Chapter III: Dynamics of Transition will elaborate on this subject.

<sup>109</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 230-231.

believed that “US troop presence in Germany is the pathway to stability.”<sup>110</sup> His offensive quickly yielded results: the Soviets hesitantly agreed that U.S. stability would increase European stability, as Gorbachev replied to Baker that “it is quite possible” that the presence of American troops could play a containing role.<sup>111</sup> Months later, Gorbachev even asserted that “it is impossible to achieve anything in Europe without the United States.”<sup>112</sup> Shevardnadze, too, agreed with Baker that U.S. military presence in Europe would generate “long-term stability,” and even requested the troops to remain at least seven to ten years.<sup>113</sup>

This narrative employed by U.S. officials can be explained fairly well by scholarly publications on the national identity of the United States during the Cold War.<sup>114</sup> Princeton Professor of Politics and International Affairs Anne-Marie Slaughter maintains that during the Cold War the U.S. employed a national identity narrative of the U.S. as the leader of the free world against the communist world.<sup>115</sup> David Campbell, Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Colgate University, agrees. Campbell cites the 1958 NSC policy paper which detailed that the “[U.S.] goal abroad must be to strive unceasingly, in concert with other nations, for peace and security and to establish our nation firmly as the pioneer in breaking through to new levels of human achievement and well-being.”<sup>116</sup> The primary sources, in which the U.S. positions itself as the guardian of free Europe, suggest a match with these scholarly claims. However, it could be argued that the narratives described in the literature originated in the zeniths of the Cold War, and therefore, might not apply to the particular year of 1990 – for instance, because the intense hostility with the Soviet Union was over at that point. Ronald Krebs, however, disagrees and states that the alleged national mission of spreading freedom

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<sup>110</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 8.

<sup>111</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow (Excerpts),” (February 9, 1990), 9.

<sup>112</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 32.

<sup>113</sup> “James A. Baker III, ‘My meeting with Shevardnadze’. Memorandum for the President,” (April 5, 1990), 4. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,”

<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325694-Document-17-James-A-Baker-III-Memorandum-for-the>.

Chapter IV: Security Considerations will elaborate on this.

<sup>114</sup> There is a myriad of scholarly publications on American national identity. Yet, most focus on ‘domestic’ identity – these usually address the Constitution, puritanism, colonialism, ‘the melting pot’ and so forth – and less so on national identity in the context of foreign policy. Therefore, I chose not to address these elements.

<sup>115</sup> Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Preface,” in “A National Strategic Narrative,” Mr. Y, *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars* (2011), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/A%20National%20Strategic%20Narrative.pdf>.

<sup>116</sup> David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 24.

and democracy is a stable factor in recent U.S. identity.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, we can conclude that the U.S. narrative employed during the 1990 negotiations fits within the historical trend of U.S. national identity.

Though there was much emphasis on German sovereignty during the negotiations, the U.S. military presence in the FRG, as well as the Soviet presence in the GDR, was legitimised by Genscher as a legacy of the Second World War.<sup>118</sup> Gorbachev extended this reasoning and explained how this linked to the 2 + 4 construction: “the legal results of the war established by the victors ... asserts the right for [*sic*] the four powers to participate in the German process.”<sup>119</sup> So, these men asserted, the involvement of the U.S. and the Soviet Union in ending the Second World War gave them the right to participate in the negotiations on German unification.

Furthermore, Gorbachev indicated that the suffering of the Soviet people gave the Kremlin the right to participate in the 2 + 4 structure, as he said that the “[Soviet] people will not accept a unilateral decision.”<sup>120</sup> This statement fitted the general trend in the negotiations of the Soviet party feeling relatively deprived. For instance, Kryuchkov explained to Gates that the Soviets were very concerned with the German question: “The other countries are different. But the USSR had paid a terrible price in World War II – 20 million killed.”<sup>121</sup> Gorbachev too repeatedly pointed to the “terrible losses” the Soviet Union had suffered in World War II and even stated that the war had “left people in the Soviet Union suffering more than others.”<sup>122</sup> On several occasions, Gorbachev clarified the somewhat hesitant Soviet position by explaining that its public opinion was negative towards reunification due to their great sacrifices in the Second World War.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Krebs, *Narrative and the Making of US National Security*, 14.

<sup>118</sup> “Mr. Hurd to Sir C. Mallaby (Bonn). Telegraphic N. 85: Secretary of State’s Call on Herr Genscher: German Unification,” (February 6, 1990), 3. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325676-Document-02-Mr-Hurd-to-Sir-C-Mallaby-Bonn>.

<sup>119</sup> “Discussion of the German Question at a Private Meeting in the Office of the CPSU CC General Secretary,” (January 26, 1990).

<sup>120</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 31-32.

<sup>121</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Robert Gates and Vladimir Kryuchkov in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 10.

<sup>122</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.,” (May 31, 1990), 8; Kohl, *Erinnerungen, 1982-1990*, 1066. My translation. Original text: “Zu diesen Realitäten gehöre es, dass es einen Krieg gegeben habe, unter dem die Menschen in der Sowjetunion mehr hätten leiden müssen als andere.”

<sup>123</sup> For instance during: “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 31-32; “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, Moscow (Excerpts),” (July 15, 1990), 4; “James A. Baker III, ‘My meeting with Shevardnadze’. Memorandum for the President,” (April 5, 1990), 4-5; “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Francois Mitterrand (excerpts),” (May 25, 1990), 9. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325696-Document-19-Record-of-conversation-between>.

Academic publications on Soviet historical narratives can help clarify Gorbachev's references to the Second World War – or the Great Patriotic War, as the Soviets called it. Scholars agree that the Second World War was one of the most important elements of the national identity narrative of the Soviet Union.<sup>124</sup> During the Soviet era – though slightly less during the Gorbachev years due to the *glasnost*-invoked revisitation of history – the Second World War was widely used to bolster national pride and to legitimise the Soviet Union.<sup>125</sup> This resonates in a recurring heroic narrative in Soviet history, as described by James Wertsch, Professor of Sociocultural Anthropology at Washington University. Wertsch describes the narrative as following: an innocent Russia is taken by surprise by a vicious foreign enemy, Russia loses almost everything while greatly suffering, but it all ends with “heroism and exceptionalism, and against all odds, Russia, acting alone, triumphs and succeeds.”<sup>126</sup> This narrative connects to Gorbachev's historical arguments employed in the negotiations on German unification about the hardships of the Soviet people during the Second World War.

Nevertheless, the friendly historical ties between the German and the Russian nations were repeatedly emphasised in the 1990 negotiations by both parties. Kohl, for instance, maintained in the historically significant meeting in the Caucasus that “the entire history between Russia and Germany shows that there was never an inherent enmity between the Russians and Germans.”<sup>127</sup> Gorbachev, too, expressed his appreciation for this historical partnership on multiple occasions and explained that he wanted to ameliorate this relationship.<sup>128</sup> It is likely that this amity contributed to Gorbachev's acceptance of Kohl's offer to provide financial support to the Soviet Union – which is striking, as Gorbachev had already declined a similar offer by Bush.

### *Interim Conclusion*

In conclusion, the chief decision-makers in the U.S. and the FRG agreed that, given Germany's violent past and tendencies to create instability, a united Germany should not be neutral – a narrative that fitted the apologetic tendencies in Germany's national identity. This accordance

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<sup>124</sup> Nina Tumarkin, “The Great Patriotic War as myth and memory,” *European Review* 11, no. 4 (2003): 595; Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, “Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet–Era Monuments and Post–Soviet National Identity in Moscow,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92, no. 3 (2002): 524.

<sup>125</sup> Tumarkin, “The Great Patriotic War,” 601, 609–610.

<sup>126</sup> James V. Wertsch, “The Narrative Organization of Collective Memory,” *Ethos* 36 no. 1 (2008): 131.

<sup>127</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, Moscow (Excerpts),” (July 15, 1990), 7.

<sup>128</sup> For instance: “Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl,” (February 10, 1990), 3.

solidified in the Camp David meetings of late February and was often used throughout the negotiation process.<sup>129</sup> The Soviet officials, too, acknowledged German historical trends of aggression and the dangers of German neutrality. They, however, refused to settle on an unambiguous and definitive position early in the negotiations. Therefore, it remained up for discussion whether a unified Germany would be neutral, or part of NATO, the WTO, or another security structure.

Moreover, it appeared that references to the events of the twentieth century were interwoven in the negotiations on the German unification. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union used these arguments to legitimise their current policies. The U.S. referred to the violent results of their earlier isolationism and pledged that their military presence would increase European stability. The Soviets used their suffering and experiences with the Second World War, fitting the tendency in the Soviet identity to feel relatively deprived, to secure their say in the German unification process. The West Germans, all the while, behaved compassionately, trying to fix what was broken in order to reassure German unity. The behaviour of the officials echoes scholarly knowledge on national identities – which in itself affirms the explanatory power of the theoretical concept of ‘national identity’.

In short, the analysis of the historical arguments employed in the negotiations on German unification reveals that the negotiating parties were primarily occupied with preventing a resurgence of the ‘German-invoked’ violence of the twentieth century. The primary goal of the West was to anchor the new Germany within the NATO framework, while the Soviets often changed their position on the matter of Germany’s future alliance. This total occupation with restricting Germany delicately sheds light on the alleged NATO promise: at a minimum, it seems to indicate that neither the FRG nor the U.S. had the intention to expand NATO beyond the borders of a reunified Germany. It logically follows then that, when U.S. and FRG officials made the ‘NATO promise’, they were referring to East German soil, instead of Eastern European territory.

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<sup>129</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush at Camp David,” (February 24, 1990), 6.

## Chapter III      Theme: Dynamics of Transition

The continental European events of 1989 and 1990 moved faster than perhaps anyone had expected. When the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, the Cold War began to unravel remarkably quick and peaceful. Germany stood on the brink of reunification, while the Soviet empire was starting to fall apart – and the U.S. became stronger than ever. Hastily, the world had to adapt to the true geopolitical storm that is now often referred to as the end of the Cold War.

In the scholarly field of international relations, many academics have attempted to explain the phenomena of ‘transition phases’ – situations that are in their transitional nature comparable to the end of the Cold War. One influential example is *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987) in which the prominent British historian Paul Kennedy elaborated extensively on transition processes. As the title hints, Kennedy theorises in this book how and why the various ‘great powers’ in history have risen and fallen, and his central thesis is that economic and technological developments are the drivers of power changes.<sup>130</sup>

Another important scholar who has been occupied with theorising transitions in international relations is Douglas Lemke, political scientist at Penn State University. Lemke largely built his research on the works of A.F.K. Organski, who published his opus magnum *World Politics* in 1958. Both scholars devoted themselves to the development of the ‘power transition theory’. The power transition theory examines the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the strongest states with the workings of the international system, or the status quo, which is shaped by the dominant state.<sup>131</sup> A state’s power is determined by its internal growth – comparable to what Kennedy described as technological and economic developments – but as growth rates differ per state, power is always relative and never constant.<sup>132</sup> According to power transition theory, changes in the international system are caused by the relatively stronger growth of a state that is dissatisfied with the status quo, and thus decides to ‘challenge’ the dominant state. When the challenger state triumphs, it becomes the new dominant state, and the international system is altered to the likes of the challenger-turned-dominant state. However, when the challenger state is equal to the dominant state, a stage of parity emerges, as present

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<sup>130</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), xv, 439.

<sup>131</sup> Douglas Lemke, “The Continuation of History: Power Transition Theory and the End of the Cold War,” *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 1 (1997): 23-24.

<sup>132</sup> Lemke, “The Continuation of History,” 24.



during the Cold War.<sup>133</sup> Where Organski foresaw only a global hierarchy of states, Lemke added that there are regional hierarchies within the global one as well. He reasons that there are dominant states and challenger states within each geographic region, such as the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe and the People's Republic of China in Asia.<sup>134</sup>

G. John Ikenberry, Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University and a leading liberal internationalist, devoted his time to explain the relative rise of the U.S. around 1990. In his book *Liberal Leviathan* (2011), he asserts that any international order is established and maintained through either consent, balance, or command.<sup>135</sup> In an order based on consent, agreed-upon rules and institutions regulate the exercise of power. An order based on balance is sustained through an equilibrium of power among the most powerful states in which no state is dominant – as present during the Cold War. On the contrary, in an international order based on command, one state is dominant. This state can use coercion or more moderate means to enforce the subordinate states to accept the imposed international order – as was the case with the U.S. around 1990.<sup>136</sup> Ikenberry's command-based order is thus similar to the hierarchical international order as discussed in power transition theory. In conclusion, these power transition theories are apt to elucidate the transition period of 1989-1990.

### *Overcoming the Cold War*

The previous chapter already gave a preview that, in 1990, there was a general preparedness of the negotiating parties to overcome their historical hostilities. The Soviet Union and the German nation reconciled after the horrors of the Second World War, but more importantly, the United States and the Soviet Union emphasised their willingness to overcome their Cold War rivalry. Still, Cold War hostilities had dominated the public and diplomatic spheres for decennia, and therefore, could not simply vanish into thin air. The negotiations on German unification, which took place in the midst of the transition period, proved an extraordinary period: it included both the older hostile language and reconciliatory talk.

Much of the conduct of the U.S. negotiators in the talks about German reunification was based on the strategy to win over the Soviet delegation's trust. Washington was well aware that

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<sup>133</sup> Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23-25; Lemke, "The Continuation of History," 24.

<sup>134</sup> Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace*, 49.

<sup>135</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>136</sup> Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, 14-15.

historically the Soviets were proud, but that they also tended to feel relatively deprived, or as Scowcroft described, “a chronic sense of inferiority has always driven the Soviets.”<sup>137</sup> More specifically, the Soviets were afraid of being viewed as the ‘losers’ of the Cold War, as illustrated by Gorbachev’s heated remark that it was “nonsense” that one of the sides won the Cold War.<sup>138</sup> The domestic context in which the Soviets found themselves will help clarify their insecure and anxious stance.

As it happens, by 1990, the Soviet Union was an empire in decline. As touched upon in the first chapter, the Soviet Union was coping with a mounting economic crisis. Industrial and agricultural productions were freely falling, while a chaotic transfer of economic responsibility from the Union level to the lower Republic levels took place.<sup>139</sup> According to Kennedy’s transition theory, this lack of economic and technological development in the Soviet Union caused an outflow of its power. Instead, Soviet power was transferring to the Western bloc, causing the balance-based international order of the Cold War to transform into a command-based one under the auspices of the United States. Gorbachev was well aware of this bleak situation and saw Soviet supremacy rapidly slip away. His solution was economic reform, a particularly important aspect of perestroika. Gorbachev wanted to combine “capitalist experience, socialist experience, and the experience of the worldwide scientific-technical revolutions” to renew the Soviet economy, which would help to raise the standard of living of the Soviet people.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, Gorbachev aimed at ending the Cold War through more cooperation and rapprochement with the West, perhaps in a common European home – all in the hope this would ameliorate the lives of the Soviet people and prevent Soviet loss of face.<sup>141</sup>

Gorbachev, working untiringly, warned the U.S. that it should not exploit this precarious domestic situation in the Soviet Union: “We see that sometimes you are tempted to take advantages of the situation. I think doing that would be a very big mistake.”<sup>142</sup> In a later

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<sup>137</sup> “Memorandum from Scowcroft for the President: ‘Scope Paper—The Gorbachev Summit,’” (late May, 1990), in *The Last Superpower Summits*, Savranskaya and Blanton, 566.

Chapter II: Historical Arguments elaborates on this subject.

<sup>138</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.,” (May 31, 1990), 8-9.

<sup>139</sup> Philip Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy: An Economic History of the USSR from 1945* (London: Routledge, 2014), 228-229.

<sup>140</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between George Bush and Eduard Shevardnadze in Washington,” (April 6, 1990), 5. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,”

<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325691-Document-14-Memorandum-of-conversation-between>.

5; Brown, “The Gorbachev revolution,” 248.

<sup>141</sup> Brown, “The Gorbachev revolution,” 248.

<sup>142</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 5.

instance, he added that there would be no movement forward if one of the negotiating parties would feel disadvantaged – evidently referring to the Soviet party.<sup>143</sup> So, during the Caucasus meeting in July with Kohl, Gorbachev asserted that “it is necessary to strictly take into account ... our countries’ development. We need balanced judgement, trust, mutual understanding and cooperation.”<sup>144</sup> This position, of course, corresponds with Gorbachev’s views of the common European home in which there would be increased trust and cooperation across the European continent. Still, Gorbachev did not only want to cooperate with European partners. Throughout the negotiations on German reunification, Gorbachev was also quite vocal about his willingness to cooperate with the United States. Not only did he call the record of Soviet-American relations “a story of missed opportunities,” but he also pointed out that he wanted to strengthen the “positive tendencies in the Soviet-American dialog.”<sup>145</sup>

Therefore, in January 1990, NSA Scowcroft briefed President Bush “that it is important that you continue to engage Gorbachev personally.”<sup>146</sup> He reasoned that a good relation between the two countries would encourage the Soviet leader to continue his policy of perestroika, which in turn could contribute to the U.S. reaching its goals in Europe: ending Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe and strengthening the U.S. position as a European power.<sup>147</sup> In a meeting with Bush in late February, Vaclav Havel, President of Czechoslovakia, elaborated on the Soviet concerns: “If NATO takes over Germany, it will look like defeat, one superpower conquering another.”<sup>148</sup> So, throughout the negotiations of 1990, U.S. officials did their very best not to antagonise the Soviets. Bush, for instance, answered Havel that the U.S. wants to “see problems resolved without rubbing the Soviets’ nose in failure. We will not conduct ourselves in the wrong way by saying ‘we win, you lose’.”<sup>149</sup> On another occasion,

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<sup>143</sup> “Letter from Mr. Powell (N. 10) to Mr. Wall: Thatcher-Gorbachev memorandum of conversation,” (June 8, 1990), 4.

<sup>144</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, Moscow (Excerpts),” (July 15, 1990), 3.

<sup>145</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 18; “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.,” (May 31, 1990), 1.

<sup>146</sup> “Memorandum from Scowcroft for the President: ‘Objectives for U.S.–Soviet Relations in 1990’,” (January, 1990), in *The Last Superpower Summits*, Savranskaya and Blanton, 587, 589.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 587-589.

<sup>148</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Vaclav Havel and George Bush in Washington,” (February 21, 1990), 4. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,”

<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325689-Document-12-2-Memorandum-of-conversation-between>.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Bush reassured Gorbachev that he did “not want winners and losers.”<sup>150</sup>

Baker, too, was aware that the Soviets had to feel respected. In a meeting with his Soviet counterpart Shevardnadze, for instance, Baker declared that the negotiations of German reunification “would not wield winners and losers,” but instead produce inclusive cooperation.<sup>151</sup> Additionally, already during the bilaterals on February 9, Baker reassured both Shevardnadze and Gorbachev that the U.S. did not seek to take any unilateral advantages of the relatively weak position of the Soviet Union, and repeated this statement throughout 1990.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, Baker knew that the U.S. would have to make concessions, in order to make the Soviets feel like they were treated as equals. Therefore, Baker repeatedly said that NATO was willing to take the Soviet security concerns – which, he told Gorbachev, were “completely legitimate” – into account.<sup>153</sup> To prove this, he offered Gorbachev his Nine Points in May 1990. One of the most important points entailed changing NATO into more of a political organisation with a considerably reviewed military strategy considering the diminished effectiveness of the WTO.<sup>154</sup> As this promise neatly corresponded with NATO’s London Declaration of early July, Gorbachev seemed convinced that “there is evident movement in NATO towards a transformation.”<sup>155</sup> The U.S. strategy of rapprochement seemed to bear fruit.

Despite the advancing rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the U.S. in the first half of 1990, Cold War animosity had not entirely left the stage. Gorbachev, for one, indicated in late May that he faced some vigilance and suspicion of the more conservative groups in decision-making circles, such as the military.<sup>156</sup> In the Western camp, too, there was some hesitation. During the Camp David meetings of late February, it appeared that Bush was not as historically oblivious as the Soviets were led to believe. With Kohl, he discussed the negative position of the Kremlin regarding a reunified Germany in NATO. In this context, Bush proclaimed that “the Soviets are not in a position to dictate Germany’s relationship with NATO

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<sup>150</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation, Bush–Gorbachev, First Private Meeting, Washington, 10:54 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.,” (May 31, 1990), 660.

<sup>151</sup> “James A. Baker III, ‘My meeting with Shevardnadze’. Memorandum for the President,” (April 5, 1990), 3.

<sup>152</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 5; “Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 2; “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 10.

<sup>153</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 21. Chapter IV: Security Considerations will elaborate on this subject.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>155</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, Moscow (Excerpts),” (July 15, 1990), 4.

<sup>156</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation, Bush–Gorbachev, First Private Meeting, Washington, 10:54 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.,” (May 31, 1990), 659.

... To hell with that. We prevailed, and they didn't. We can't let the Soviets clutch victory from the jaws of defeat."<sup>157</sup> Despite all of the cordial talks throughout 1990, this outburst clearly indicated that Bush had not forgotten about the Cold War.

Neither did the U.S. Congress, it appeared. According to an NSA briefing to Bush in late May, it would be "inconceivable that Congress would appropriate funds for the Soviet Union," while Moscow supported Cuba and obstruct Lithuanian independence.<sup>158</sup> In an interview in 2011, Baker, too, described the process of trying to appropriate bilateral support for the Soviet Union with Congress as very difficult and time-consuming.<sup>159</sup> Bilateral aid was not only obstructed by this Cold War animosity in Congress; the public opinion had to be taken into account too.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, Bush deemed the Soviet pride too great to accept any bilateral support from the United States.<sup>161</sup> For all these reasons, he persuaded Kohl to provide the vital aid to the Soviet Union, by stating that the FRG has "deep pockets" – a perfect example of Ikenberry's command-based order.<sup>162</sup>

### *The Rapidity of Events*

The 1990 negotiations on German unification occurred in the midst of the disentanglement of the Cold War. Throughout 1989 and 1990, several states in the Soviet sphere of influence replaced their Communist governments for non-Communist ones, thereby eroding the historical East-West partition.<sup>163</sup> And when the Berlin Wall, the starkest symbol of the Cold War, fell, the physical division of Cold War-Europe was brought down as well.<sup>164</sup> As a substantial part of these transformative processes, the negotiations on German unification were infused by the tangible atmosphere of transition. The negotiating parties differently valued the speed with which history was unfolding – but all were eager to reap the benefits of the exceptional moment in time.

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<sup>157</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush at Camp David," (February 24, 1990), 9.

<sup>158</sup> "Memorandum from Scowcroft for the President: 'Scope Paper—The Gorbachev Summit,'" (late May, 1990), 655.

<sup>159</sup> "James A. Baker, III Oral History (2011)," 32.

<sup>160</sup> "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow," (May 18, 1990), 18.

<sup>161</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Vaclav Havel and George Bush in Washington," (February 21, 1990), 3.

<sup>162</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush at Camp David," (February 24, 1990), 10.

<sup>163</sup> Adam Roberts, "An 'incredibly swift transition': reflections on the end of the Cold War," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Leffler and Westad, 518.

<sup>164</sup> Helga Haftendorn, "The unification of Germany, 1985-1991," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Leffler and Westad, 333.

In general, the representatives felt a sense of momentum. The world as they knew it was changing which gave them the chance to start over – and they were very aware of this. Per illustration, during the early negotiations of February 9, Baker stated that “[w]e didn’t do so well handling the peace in the Cold War [but] now ... we are in a better position to cooperate in preserving peace.”<sup>165</sup> Gorbachev consented to this, stressing that the parties had to adjust to the “new reality” in order to ensure stability in Europe.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, Gorbachev emphasised the need for cooperation between East and West: “In times like these we need to be constantly in touch ... [to] understand each other better.”<sup>167</sup>

However, the overall Soviet position to the quickly transitioning international order appeared bipartisan. On one end stood Gorbachev, who was welcoming of the changes in Europe. Gorbachev’s position should be interpreted by taking into account his views of a common European home, in which East and West would meet in a structure for European cooperation. On the other end stood some of Gorbachev’s more conservative colleagues in the Kremlin, who were hesitant of the rapid transitions that were taking place. Shevardnadze and Kryuchkov, for instance, displayed their great dislike of the evolving situation during the February 9 bilaterals. While the latter simply stated that the negotiators should not hurry so much, Shevardnadze worryingly declared that “the reality is that our action is late given the way events are moving” and that therefore, “all options ought to be considered.”<sup>168</sup>

One major source of concern was that Soviet officials had great difficulty with dividing their attention between the rapidly evolving international order and soaring domestic crises – or as Gorbachev put it, “many serious problems.”<sup>169</sup> In addition to a lack of economic and technological development, the Soviet Union was coping with political problems. Mainly due to his perestroika policy, the Soviet leader faced mounting domestic opposition by both pragmatists and communist hardliners in the Politburo. The resistance intensified during the 28<sup>th</sup> CPSU Party Congress in early July, which Gorbachev survived but described as “perhaps the most difficult and important period in my political life” nevertheless.<sup>170</sup> The friction in the

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<sup>165</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 5.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>167</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl,” (February 10, 1990), 1.

<sup>168</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Robert Gates and Vladimir Kryuchkov in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 11.

“Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 8.

<sup>169</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between George Bush and Eduard Shevardnadze in Washington,” (April 6, 1990), 5.

<sup>170</sup> “Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush,” (July 17, 1990), 3.

higher echelons of the CPSU also expressed itself during the negotiations on German unification, virtually freezing the remnant of political effectiveness of the Soviet delegation.

Additionally, there were problems within the Soviet sphere of influence. Over the course of 1989, a gulf of revolutions had swept across Eastern Europe, after which five of the emancipating WTO states traded their communist regimes for democratic systems. This switch had occurred in a relatively quick and peaceful manner, as Gorbachev had ordered no crackdowns since he believed the revolutions to be expressions of glasnost and perestroika.<sup>171</sup> In 1990, the Kremlin was also challenged by the Soviet republics within the Union. The successful revolutions in neighbouring socialist states had sparked nationalism in these republics, which caused the Soviet Socialist Republics in the Baltics and the Caucasus to also push for sovereignty, culminating in Lithuania's declaration of independence in March 1990.<sup>172</sup> However, despite the great pressure these challenges put on the Kremlin, Gorbachev did not seem too occupied with them – he deemed perestroika more important: “[E]vents somewhere in Nagorno-Karabakh or Vilnius should not take up more ... attention than this monumental turning-point.”<sup>173</sup>

The deteriorating situation in the Soviet Union and the resulting friction in the Politburo prevented the Soviet officials from paying sufficient attention to the negotiations on German unification, which continued with no loss of pace. When Baker made his valuable offer during the February 9 bilaterals not to move NATO one inch eastwards, Gorbachev said he would discuss it “in depth at the leadership level.”<sup>174</sup> However, as stressed in the first chapter, the issue of a united Germany's membership of NATO was just raised once, during a Politburo meeting of late January 1990.<sup>175</sup> The lack of further discussion of the question at the Kremlin significantly contributed to the Soviets' failure to secure Baker's key proposal. Moreover, it helps explain the inconsistent Soviet policy regarding full German membership of NATO. From the outset of the negotiations, the Soviets were adamantly opposed to a unified Germany becoming a NATO member. Kryuchkov, for instance, explained that the Soviet Union had “no

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<sup>171</sup> Jacques Lévesque, “The East European revolutions of 1989,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Leffler and Westad, 311; Alex Pravda, “The collapse of the Soviet Union, 1990–1991,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, Leffler and Westad, 363.

<sup>172</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 643–647; Pravda, “The collapse of the Soviet Union,” 363, 370.

<sup>173</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 7.

<sup>174</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow (Excerpts),” (February 9, 1990), 9.

<sup>175</sup> Kramer, “Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge,” 51; Smeets, “Rusland en de NAVO”; Smeets, *De Wraak van Poetin*, 108; “Interview with Eduard Shevardnadze,” *Spiegel Online*, November 26, 2009; Korshunov, “Mikhail Gorbachev: I am against all walls,” *Russia Beyond*, October 16, 2014.

enthusiasm” about a united Germany in NATO.<sup>176</sup> Kohl remembered that Shevardnadze, too, made it unmistakably clear that “the Kremlin would not tolerate the membership” of a unified Germany in NATO.<sup>177</sup> But then, suddenly and evidently not agreed upon with his delegation, Gorbachev conceded in the May 31 meeting by accepting the Helsinki Final Act. NSA Scowcroft, who was present at the historic meeting, recalled that “Gorbachev’s delegation was just beside themselves, and there were visibly nasty comments being passed back and forth between them” – again, illustrating the divisions in the Soviet delegation.<sup>178</sup>

Power transition theory helps to elucidate the implications of these dynamics. After 1945, the Soviet Union was the dominant regional power in the geographic region of Central and Eastern Europe. However, the revolutions of 1989 and 1990 successfully challenged Soviet authority, which therefore started to crumble. This deterioration was not limited to the regional power position of the Soviet Union: its global position worsened too, as the Soviet Union was severely weakened by the revolutions and other economic and political problems. As Lemke states, “the Soviet system became so untenable that the USSR could no longer compete with the USA.”<sup>179</sup> In other words, it was no longer capable of upholding the Cold War-stage of parity.

Consequently, U.S. and FRG officials were more comfortable with the way history was unfolding. The swift developments did not seem to worry them – instead, they used the rapidity of events to their advantage. The Scowcroft memorandum to President Bush from early 1990 provides valuable insight into how and why. In the briefing, Scowcroft advises Bush to stimulate reforms in the Soviet Union, as this put “long-standing U.S. objectives regarding the Soviet Union well within our reach.”<sup>180</sup> By emphasising the rapidity of events, the U.S. could exert pressure on the already politically ineffective Soviet delegates, in order to get them to consent to the West’s proposals. Again, transition theory helps to clarify this line of reasoning: The U.S. played into the instabilities in the Soviet Union, as they worked to the advantage of

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<sup>176</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Robert Gates and Vladimir Kryuchkov in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 11.

<sup>177</sup> Helmut Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1990-1994* (Munich: Droemer, 2007), 102. My translation. Original text: “Unmissverständlich machte Schewardnadse dann deutlich, dass der Kreml die Mitgliedschaft eines vereinten Deutschlands in der Nato nicht hinnehmen werde.”

<sup>178</sup> “Brent Scowcroft Oral History, National Security Advisor,” (November 12-13, 1999), 82. BOHP, Miller Center, University of Virginia, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/brent-scowcroft-oral-history-national-security-advisor>.

<sup>179</sup> Lemke, “The Continuation of History,” 27.

<sup>180</sup> “Memorandum from Scowcroft for the President: ‘Objectives for U.S.–Soviet Relations in 1990’,” (January, 1990), 587.



the United States. Eventually, this would facilitate the rise of the U.S. as the leader of a new unipolar world order.

So, President Bush, first and foremost, often made remarks about the “rapidly changing Europe.”<sup>181</sup> He mostly stressed the inevitability and “exceptional pace” of German unification, for instance when he said on May 31 that “the processes of German unification are unfolding faster than any of us could have imagined, and there is no force that can put a brake on them.”<sup>182</sup> Chancellor Kohl appeared to copy this strategy. In his memoirs, he describes how he explained to Gorbachev in early February 1990 that “German unity was inexorably approaching.”<sup>183</sup> Not only these heads of state emphasised the swift succession of events. Baker, too, repeatedly used the “deep and rapid change in the world,” that “has moved faster than anyone has anticipated” as an argument in the negotiations, and so did Gates.<sup>184</sup>

### *Interim Conclusion*

During the negotiations on German unification, the Soviet, and the U.S. and FRG delegates adopted varying positions. Much of these differences were due to the contrasting domestic and international conditions in which they found themselves, and their respective responses to this. Moreover, it appeared that personal values, ideas and worldviews of the officials involved greatly influenced the course of events.

By 1990, the Soviet Union had become severely weakened due to economic underdevelopment, revolutions in its satellite states, and division at the highest political level. On one end of the political spectrum stood Gorbachev, who reached out to his Western counterparts to ensure rapprochement. Moreover, the Soviet leader was welcoming of the changes in Europe, as they provided him with the right conditions to implement his idea of a common European home. On the other end stood conservative and pragmatist Soviet officials, who were generally cautious of the way events unfolded, knowing the Soviet Union could not keep up. This internal friction caused the political effectiveness and resilience of the Soviet

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<sup>181</sup> For instance: “Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, Bush–Gorbachev, 7:14 a.m. – 7:51 a.m.,” (February 28, 1990), in *The Last Superpower Summits*, Savranskaya and Blanton, 611.

<sup>182</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.,” (May 31, 1990), 2, 7.

<sup>183</sup> Kohl, *Erinnerungen, 1982-1990*, 1064. My translation. Original text: “Ich sagte Gorbatschow klipp und klar, dass die Entwicklung in Richtung deutsche Einheit unaufhaltsam auf uns zulaufe.”

<sup>184</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow (Excerpts),” (February 9, 1990), 3; “Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 2; “Memorandum of Conversation between Robert Gates and Vladimir Kryuchkov in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 10.

Union to plunge, and the Politburo became virtually paralysed. Consequently, the Kremlin failed to address either domestic or international problems. With regards to the NATO promise, the Soviets managed to internally discuss the question of full German membership of NATO just once. So, the domestic problems in the Soviet Union and the resulting lack of attention for other matters, contributed to the repeated failure of the Soviets to secure the Western proposals that became known as the NATO promise.

Meanwhile, the Western delegates often used reconciliatory language to overcome Cold War hostilities, while trying not to hurt the Soviet pride. Another component of their negotiating strategy was repeatedly emphasising the rapidity of the course of events, as they understood it could offer the momentum that would facilitate the realisation of their goals: strengthening the U.S. position in Europe and ensure NATO membership for a unified Germany. So, although the U.S. and the FRG pledged they would not take advantage of the domestic instabilities in the Soviet Union, they unquestionably did. In other words, the U.S. and the FRG effectively ‘steamrolled’ over the already weakened Soviet Union in order to reach their goals.

Transition theory abstractly explains the transitioning situation of 1990 as follows. The internal development – measured in economic, technological and political terms – of the Soviet Union lagged behind the development rates of the relatively stronger United States. This caused the U.S. to become dissatisfied with the workings of the status quo of the Cold War-international order, which was a stage of parity, or bipolarity. Therefore, the U.S. decided to challenge it, in the ways discussed above. The attempt proved successful, as the Soviet Union was relatively weaker, resulting in a new, unipolar world order altered to the likes of the United States. Though largely following the same line of reasoning, scholars attribute different names to the new order. Ikenberry, for instance, would call it a command-based order while Lemke would call it a U.S.-dominated world order.

## Chapter IV Theme: Security Considerations

Both historical factors and the atmosphere of transition have been proven decisive to the negotiations on German unification. However, one vital element has yet been left undiscussed, namely security considerations. The negotiators in the talks on German unification were representatives of states that had diametrically opposed each other for over forty years. During the Cold War, East and West had found themselves subordinate to an almost constant military threat. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the delegates gave security a prominent position on the agenda of the negotiations on German unification. Although the previous chapter revealed that the U.S. had a considerable advantage over the Soviet Union, both parties voiced willingness for concessions to ensure future security in Europe and beyond.

One distinctive school in international relations devotes itself to explaining security-related issues: Realism. Though covering a wide variety of sub-schools, Realism typically describes international relations as a contest for power in which states are considered to act in their own national interest.<sup>185</sup> According to Kenneth Waltz, political scientist and founder of the influential sub-school of neo-Realism, survival is the primary aim of states, because “[s]urvival is a prerequisite to achieving any goals that states may have.”<sup>186</sup> The international system is anarchical, and states within this system seek to create security for themselves by increasing their military and economic power. They tend to do this in an amoral, rather than a moral manner. Therefore, Realists argue, conflicts between states are inevitable.<sup>187</sup>

However, reality sometimes contradicts this traditional Realist paradigm and proves that disputing states do cooperate, as the negotiations on German unification illustrate. The sub-school of defensive Realism seeks to explain phenomena of this kind. According to Jeffrey Taliaferro, political scientist at Tufts University, defensive Realists argue that states “generally pursue moderate strategies as the best route to security.” Accordingly, states do not strive to maximise their power but to ensure their survival instead.<sup>188</sup> As one cannot predict the outcome of an arms race, competition can be very risky, and therefore, defensive Realists argue, states often opt for the ‘safer’ option of cooperation.<sup>189</sup> Still, defensive Realists agree that the security

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<sup>185</sup> Robert J. Jackson, *Global Politics in the 21st Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 60, 540.

<sup>186</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 91-92.

<sup>187</sup> Jackson, *Global Politics*, 61-62.

<sup>188</sup> Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited,” *International Security* 25, no. 3 (2000-2001): 129, 159.

<sup>189</sup> Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy,” 138.

dilemma is an uncompromising feature of the international order.<sup>190</sup> The concept of the ‘security dilemma’ describes the phenomenon that through “arming for self-defence a state might decrease its security via the unintended effect of making others insecure, sparking them to arm in response.”<sup>191</sup> The security dilemma thus causes states to worry about the future intentions and relative power of other states.<sup>192</sup> Still, defensive Realists suppose that states tend to opt for the safer option of moderate means and cooperation. Therefore, they deny the notion that the security dilemma inherently generates intense conflict.<sup>193</sup> Moreover, defensive Realists acknowledge that domestic politics, material power, and leaders’ perceptions influence a state’s efficacy and its foreign policy.<sup>194</sup>

This all corresponds with the situation during the negotiations on German unification in which the negotiating parties expressed concerns about their security but opted for cooperation instead. So, defensive Realism and its explanation of the security dilemma can be particularly useful tools to clarify the behaviour of the delegates during the negotiations on German unification.<sup>195</sup>

### *The Strategic Puzzle*

The decades prior to the geopolitical rollercoaster of 1989 and 1990 were marked by an intense hostility between the White House and the Kremlin. As both sides possessed nuclear weapons, the two superpowers found themselves in an almost constant state of mutually assured destruction. It is therefore not unthinkable that, throughout the negotiations on German reunification, the representatives of these states were very caught up in ensuring security and stability in order to prevent a continuation of the dangerous situation – for reasons discussed in previous chapters. It appeared, however, that some delegations acted in accordance with a double agenda.

As elaborated on in the chapter on historical arguments, the negotiating parties saw a

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 129, 131.

<sup>191</sup> William C. Wohlforth, “Realism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, eds. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 142.

<sup>192</sup> Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy,” 129.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>195</sup> Realist schools argue that states are the principal actors in international relations. This contradicts FPA, that proscribes that humans are the decision-making actors that drive the course of events in world politics. However, since I only use Realist concepts as explanatory tools, this contradiction should offer no academic difficulties.

united Germany as a threat because of its violent past.<sup>196</sup> To some, the future looked gloomy as well. Up to 1990, the FRG was protected by the nuclear umbrella of the United States within the NATO framework.<sup>197</sup> Consequently, this protection would withdraw if a united Germany would be placed outside of alliances. U.S. negotiators intelligently used this fact as a security-related argument in favour of full German membership of NATO. As early as the February bilaterals, Baker and Gates contended that a neutral Germany would “undoubtedly acquire its own independent nuclear capability.”<sup>198</sup> Moreover, if a reunited Germany were to be anchored in NATO, it would be easier to destroy its “nuclear, biological, or chemical potential.”<sup>199</sup> Therefore, Gates reasoned, full membership of NATO would restrain Germany’s violent potential, leaving the Soviets with “no reason to fear.”<sup>200</sup> Gorbachev warmed up to this argumentation, tentatively agreeing that anchoring Germany within European structures would be “the best way” to secure stability on the continent.<sup>201</sup>

The other major security-related argument that U.S. officials employed in order to assure German membership of NATO was that U.S. troop presence would enhance stability on the European continent.<sup>202</sup> Baker and Bush often explained that without German membership of NATO, U.S. troops would have to leave the continent, as “NATO [was] the mechanism for securing the U.S. presence in Europe.”<sup>203</sup> To the astonishment of U.S. delegates, the Soviets recognised the importance of a U.S. presence in Europe. Gorbachev thought that both superpowers were “equally integrated into European problems” and that the U.S. should stay in Europe to prevent these problems from exploding.<sup>204</sup> Shevardnadze, too, insisted during a

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<sup>196</sup> This chapter briefly discusses the perceived threats of a united Germany to European security. Chapter II: Historical Arguments elaborates widely on the historical grounds of this threat.

<sup>197</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 20.

<sup>198</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 3; “Memorandum of Conversation between Robert Gates and Vladimir Kryuchkov in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 10; “Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 6.

<sup>199</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 20.

<sup>200</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Robert Gates and Vladimir Kryuchkov in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 10.

<sup>201</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 9.

<sup>202</sup> For instance: “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.,” (May 31, 1990), 3; “Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 8.

For the historical roots of this argument and the following positions, see Chapter II: Historical Arguments.

<sup>203</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow (Excerpts),” (February 9, 1990), 5; Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 243; “Memorandum of Conversation between George Bush and Eduard Shevardnadze in Washington,” (April 6, 1990), 8.

<sup>204</sup> Savranskaya and Blanton, *The Last Superpower Summits*, 489.

conversation with Baker in early May that the Soviets wanted U.S. military presence – “not just political and economic presence” – in Europe for at least seven years, but “probably longer.”<sup>205</sup>

The Soviet consent to U.S. military presence in Europe was to the sheer luck of the White House, as the latter operated with a double strategic agenda: it aimed at maintaining and extending its strategic position in Europe. The Scowcroft memorandum to Bush from January 1990 helps identify this goal. The NSA wrote that the U.S. found itself in “a rare period, in which we can seek to achieve a fundamental shift in the strategic balance, particularly in Europe.”<sup>206</sup> The transition period of 1989-1990 put it within reach for the U.S. to “facilitate the ... withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Eastern Europe,” while also causing “a dramatic reduction in the Soviet military threat to Europe and the United States.”<sup>207</sup> Moreover, a declassified CIA briefing of April 1990 reveals that the U.S. was aware of the weakening Eastern bloc: “The Warsaw Pact as a military alliance is essentially dead, and Soviet efforts to convert it into a political alliance will ultimately fail.”<sup>208</sup> During the Open Skies conference in mid-February, Baker already openly hinted to the U.S. ambitions to fortify its position in Europe. According to the diaries of Shevardnadze’s aide Stepanov-Mamaladze, Baker said that “if we [withdraw] beyond the ocean, we would lose our influence over European affairs.”<sup>209</sup> A briefing by the State Department in late February on the 2 + 4 framework further affirms it. The document communicates that ‘2 + 4’ offered the scope to “both publicly and privately reinforce your point that America is and will remain a European power.”<sup>210</sup> Again, NATO was the only legitimate way for the U.S. to remain in Europe and to fulfil its strategic goals, which explains why the U.S. was fervently lobbying for full NATO membership for a united Germany. So, as Smeets summarises, U.S. officials stood in line with former NATO Secretary General Lord Ismay who saw the alliance as a vehicle to “keep the Soviets out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.”<sup>211</sup>

Still, though the negotiations involved much talk of cooperation and amity, the U.S. did not wholeheartedly trust the other negotiating parties. Firstly, U.S. officials still considered the

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<sup>205</sup> “James A. Baker III, ‘My meeting with Shevardnadze’. Memorandum for the President,” (April 5, 1990), 4-5.

<sup>206</sup> “Memorandum from Scowcroft for the President: ‘Objectives for U.S.–Soviet Relations in 1990’,” (January, 1990), 587.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 589.

<sup>208</sup> “National Intelligence Estimate 12–90, ‘The Future of Eastern Europe,’ (Key Judgments Only)” in *Masterpieces of History: The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989*, eds. Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton, and Vladislav Zukov (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), 690.

<sup>209</sup> “Teimuraz Stepanov-Mamaladze diary,” (February 12, 1990), 2.

<sup>210</sup> “U.S. State Department, Two Plus Four: Advantages, Possible Concerns and Rebuttal Points,” (February 21, 1990), 1.

<sup>211</sup> Smeets, “Rusland en de NAVO.”

Soviet Union a threat, albeit a potential one. In a 2011 interview, Robert Gates explained that, during the negotiations on German unification, it was a priority not to alienate the Soviets: “if you don’t get it right with Russia, none of the rest matters.”<sup>212</sup> NSC members Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice agree to this and describe that the U.S. negotiators did not want the Kremlin to “nurture a lasting bitterness” that could someday lead them to compromise the new, developing European order.<sup>213</sup> Secondly, the White House feared that the FRG might not honour its pledges. Scowcroft describes in his memoirs that “there was always the danger [Kohl] might feel compelled to strike a bargain with the Soviets: German neutrality in exchange for unification.”<sup>214</sup> So, despite Kohl’s assurances that he was committed to NATO, U.S. officials were concerned that he would sacrifice NATO and cut a deal with the Soviet Union: the unification of the Germanies was Kohl’s principal aim, and only the Kremlin could undermine it. Sarotte explains that this was not unimaginable, as the alliance “was not a beloved one.”<sup>215</sup>

The Soviets had their apprehensions, too. One of the primary sources of concern was the shifting strategic balance, which had tilted in favour of the United States. Of course, this was caused not in the least by the relative decline of the Soviet Union, as discussed in the previous chapter. The Soviets were primarily plagued by the idea that the WTO was in jeopardy, as it was about to lose its most prized member to the other side.<sup>216</sup> During multiple conversations with his Western negotiating partners, Gorbachev addressed this topic. Already in early February, he said to Kohl that the WTO would fall apart without the GDR in the alliance.<sup>217</sup> In mid-May, Gorbachev extensively expressed his discontent with German membership of NATO to James Baker. He argued that, if a reunified Germany would enter NATO, “it will create a serious shift in the correlation of forces, the entire strategic balance.”<sup>218</sup> He added that it would strengthen “your military alliance,” while the WTO was rapidly transforming into a “purely political situation.”<sup>219</sup> Illustrative of his great concern, Gorbachev emphasised at the end of the conversation again that “the strategic balance in Europe and the

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<sup>212</sup> “Robert M. Gates Oral History, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence; Deputy National Security Advisor; Director of Central Intelligence,” (July 23-24, 2000), 101. BOHP, Miller Center, University of Virginia, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/robert-m-gates-deputy-director-central>.

<sup>213</sup> Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 197.

<sup>214</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 234.

<sup>215</sup> Sarotte, “Perpetuating U.S. Preeminence,” 112.

<sup>216</sup> Spohr and Reynolds, *Transcending the Cold War*, 214.

<sup>217</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl,” (February 10, 1990), 3.

<sup>218</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 5.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

entire world” would change if a united Germany became a NATO member.<sup>220</sup> In late May, in a meeting with Bush, Gorbachev again addressed the issue slightly desperately, saying that German membership of NATO would “immediately create an unbalanced situation,” and it would generate “issues ... to which nobody would be able to find an answer.”<sup>221</sup>

Moreover, Gorbachev was alarmed by the fact that the border of NATO was moving closer to him, Bush wrote in his memoirs.<sup>222</sup> According to the Chernyaev diaries, this concern was not limited to Gorbachev. Others in the higher echelons of the CPSU worried about the advancing of NATO, too – as illustrated by Politburo member Yegor Ligachev, who reportedly anxiously called out that “NATO is getting close to our borders!”<sup>223</sup> However, as stressed previously, this concern was not discussed in any Politburo meeting after January 1990.

So, throughout the negotiations on German unification, the U.S. and the Soviet Union found themselves in a security dilemma. Both states were distrustful of the other’s intentions, and therefore, they aimed at maximising their security to ensure their survival. However, the Kremlin and the White House were engaged in neither an arms race nor another type of conflict, as traditional Realists would predict: the parties opted for cooperation instead. Defensive Realism helps explain this somewhat surprising decision. For the Soviet Union, resorting to violence was not an option, as it was very likely that it would lose any military confrontation with the United States due to its weak position. Therefore, the Kremlin chose for cooperation, the ‘safe’ option. The U.S., in contrast, found itself on the advantageous side of the strategic balance. Still, as the non-violent conditions were already right to achieve their strategic goals in Europe – a military conflict would merely cause an unpredictable situation – the U.S. opted for cooperation too.

### *Creating a Scope for Cooperation*

As explained previously, the Soviet Union had become severely weakened, causing the U.S. to become relatively more powerful. However, although the strategic balance had shifted in favour of the U.S. and the parties had some mistrust and security concerns, all negotiating parties voiced readiness to cooperate in a future pan-European security structure. Moreover, they

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>221</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.,” (May 31, 1990), 8.

<sup>222</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 248.

<sup>223</sup> “The Diary of Anatoly S. Chernyaev,” (1990), 29. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB317/chernyaev\\_1990.pdf](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB317/chernyaev_1990.pdf).



expressed willingness to take into account each other's security concerns to ensure the end goal of stability in Europe – a perfect illustration of defensive Realism. However, in the end, some promises made proved to be sincerer than others.

Previous chapters discussed that Gorbachev was mainly occupied with domestic and transnational problems, and therefore, had little time left to spend on other issues. Consequentially, Gorbachev, though full of ideals, lacked a clear view of what a future European security structure should look like. His ambiguous position became painfully clear during a key meeting with Baker in mid-May, rather far along in the negotiation process. To Baker's question what Gorbachev aspired for the future alliance status of Germany, he answered: "I don't know. Maybe non-aligned. Maybe some special status."<sup>224</sup>

Gorbachev had a variety of ideas about the future of the military alliances. The key one was that NATO and the WTO were to be brought "closer together" in a framework, in which military structures would be subordinate to politics, or even dissolved.<sup>225</sup> His logic was that "if we want to put an end to the split of the continent once and forever, then the military-political structures too should be synchronized in accordance with the unifying tendencies of the all-European process."<sup>226</sup> Still, Gorbachev was not clear about the structure that would steer this cooperation in the right direction. In some instances, Gorbachev advocated for the common European home, while in others he argued that the CSCE would be the best fit.<sup>227</sup> Astonishingly, Gorbachev even suggested to Western officials on three separate occasions that the Soviet Union could become a NATO member if the alliance were transformed, defending slightly irritated that it was "not such a wild fantasy."<sup>228</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this odd proposal was to the great dislike of Gorbachev's more conservative colleagues at the Kremlin.<sup>229</sup> Though Soviet officials generally agreed on the importance of pan-European cooperation rapprochement – "only a pan-European system ... can give us guarantees," Falin noted – there were differing ideas about the form this would have to

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<sup>224</sup> "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow," (May 18, 1990), 25.

<sup>225</sup> "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.," (May 31, 1990), 4, 8.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>227</sup> Nünlist, Aunesluoma, and Zogg, "The Road to the Charter of Paris," 12.

<sup>228</sup> "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow," (May 18, 1990), 25-26; "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.," (May 31, 1990), 4; "Letter from Mr. Powell (N. 10) to Mr. Wall: Thatcher-Gorbachev memorandum of conversation," (June 8, 1990), 6.

<sup>229</sup> "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow," (May 18, 1990), 26.

assume.<sup>230</sup> Shevardnadze, the second most important Soviet official during the negotiations on German unification, for instance, placed his hope in the CSCE.<sup>231</sup> The apparent lack of unison on the future of security structures corresponds with the trend of political friction within the Kremlin at the time.<sup>232</sup>

Meanwhile, the Western bloc was atypically divided, too. On one end stood FRG officials Genscher and Kohl, who appeared receptive to the Soviet proposals. Even before the negotiations commenced, both had expressed their support for a new pan-European security structure, in which the CSCE was to assume a central role.<sup>233</sup> U.S. officials, on the other hand, were not convinced of this idea. With a slip of the tongue, Baker called a pan-European security structure “a dream,” thereby accidentally revealing his sceptical position to Gorbachev and his aides.<sup>234</sup> President Bush, too, was critical of Soviet and West-German proposals. Though he acknowledged that the negotiating parties should indeed discuss expanding the CSCE, he expected that such a framework could not replace the alliances any time soon.<sup>235</sup> Moreover, Bush believed that the CSCE could not replace NATO as “the core of the West’s deterrent strategy in Europe” and neither could it provide “the fundamental justification for U.S. troops in Europe,” as he told Kohl at the Camp David meetings of late February.<sup>236</sup>

Despite the fact that the White House and the Kremlin were evidently not on the same page with regards to future security structures, U.S. officials did their best to respond to the Soviets’ ideas and concerns. Throughout the negotiations on German unification, U.S. officials consistently declared that they were willing to take the Soviets’ security concerns into consideration.<sup>237</sup> Baker, first and foremost, avowed from the outset of the negotiation process in early February that “it is necessary to a certain degree” to take into account the security

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<sup>230</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.,” (May 31, 1990), 11.

<sup>231</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 29; “September 12 Two-Plus-Four Ministerial in Moscow: Detailed account [includes text of the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany and Agreed Minute to the Treaty on the special military status of the GDR after unification],” (November 2, 1990), 12.

<sup>232</sup> Chapter III: Dynamics of Transition elaborates on this subject.

<sup>233</sup> Nünlist, Aunesluoma, and Zogg, “The Road to the Charter of Paris,” 13.

<sup>234</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 29-30.

<sup>235</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.,” (May 31, 1990), 7.

<sup>236</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush at Camp David,” (February 24, 1990), 9.

<sup>237</sup> Chapter III: Dynamics of Transition elaborates on this subject.

concerns of Germany's neighbours.<sup>238</sup> Gates, too, told his Soviet counterpart Kryuchkov that the U.S. was aware of the security concerns a reunified Germany created for the Soviet Union.<sup>239</sup> It was in this context that Baker guaranteed Gorbachev that "there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction one inch to the east," the reassurance that became known as the 'NATO promise'.<sup>240</sup> Though Baker never re-made the promise after February 9, he continued to stress that the White House did consider Moscow's security concerns. On May 18, he presented Gorbachev his Nine Points, which he described as "examples of ways in which we tried to take your completely legitimate concerns into consideration as we developed our policy towards Germany."<sup>241</sup> In the end, Baker's reassuring efforts yielded results, as his Nine Points ultimately convinced Gorbachev to accept German membership of NATO, according to Chernyaev.<sup>242</sup>

Bush acted along the same lines as Baker: he, too, repeatedly stressed that the U.S. was not ignorant of Soviet interests. He claimed that the White House did not attempt to "downgrade the position which the Soviet Union rightly occupies" and that it did not seek to isolate or harm the Soviets.<sup>243</sup> Moreover, Bush explained that an "expanded NATO does not mean a threat to the Soviet interests."<sup>244</sup> In Bush's view, "such a model ... correspond[ed] to the Soviet interests," as the wider context of the CSCE would be taken into consideration.<sup>245</sup> Kohl, however, slightly disagreed with this line of reasoning. In his memoirs, he recalled that he correctly understood Soviet interests and wrote that, "naturally," NATO could not expand its territory to the GDR.<sup>246</sup> So, at the Camp David meetings, he emphasised the need to give the Soviets "something in return," as German membership of NATO would create security

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<sup>238</sup> "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow (Excerpts)," (February 9, 1990), 5; "Memorandum of Conversation between James Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze in Moscow," (February 9, 1990), 2.

<sup>239</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Robert Gates and Vladimir Kryuchkov in Moscow," (February 9, 1990), 12.

<sup>240</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow," (February 9, 1990), 6.

<sup>241</sup> "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow," (May 18, 1990), 21.

<sup>242</sup> Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times*, 550.

<sup>243</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, Bush-Gorbachev, First Private Meeting, Washington, 10:54 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.," (May 31, 1990), 660; "Briefing Allies on Washington Summit," U.S. Department of State Cable," (June 15, 1990).

<sup>244</sup> "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.," (May 31, 1990), 3.

<sup>245</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation between George Bush and Eduard Shevardnadze in Washington," (April 6, 1990), 8.

<sup>246</sup> "Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush. White House, Washington D.C.," (May 31, 1990), 3.

<sup>247</sup> Kohl, *Erinnerungen, 1982-1990*, 1065.

concerns for the Soviet Union.<sup>247</sup> After these meetings at Camp David, the delegations of the FRG and the U.S. formed one front, agreeing that unless the Soviets were reassured by palpable offers, there was no chance that the Kremlin would accept NATO membership for a united Germany.

Therefore, the Western delegations came up with concrete reassurances that responded to Soviet ideas and concerns. Firstly, they offered that NATO would assume a more political role in the future. According to Sarotte, the goal was “to make NATO seem less threatening outwardly but to maintain its essential characteristics.”<sup>248</sup> In his memoirs, President Bush recalls that it was vital to show the Soviets that the character of NATO was changing, in order to convince them that Germany in NATO would not pose a future threat.<sup>249</sup> Already in February, Bush proclaimed that NATO would start following a “revised, ... political agenda.”<sup>250</sup> However, the offer did not reappear in the negotiations until late spring, when Baker adopted it into his Nine Points. On May 18, the Secretary of State proposed to Gorbachev that NATO would become more of a political organisation, with a “major review of military strategy in light of the reduced effectiveness of the Warsaw Pact and the need to strengthen the political role of the alliances.”<sup>251</sup> These pledges seemed convincing to Gorbachev, as the Soviet leader said to Kohl in mid-July that “there is evident movement in NATO towards a transformation.”<sup>252</sup> By offering to change NATO into a more political organisation, Western delegates countered arguments that the Soviets deployed during the negotiations on German unification: that an enlarged NATO would pose a military threat to the Soviet Union, and that the strategic balance was shifting due to the weakening of the WTO.

Secondly, the Western delegates offered to expand the CSCE as a framework for future pan-European cooperation. This, too, was included in Baker’s Nine Points: he pledged that the West was planning “to ultimately transform the CSCE into a permanent institution that would become an important cornerstone of a new Europe.”<sup>253</sup> During the NATO summit of early July, Secretary-General Wörner confirmed Baker’s proposal by voicing that the CSCE would be

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<sup>247</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush at Camp David,” (February 24, 1990), 10.

<sup>248</sup> Sarotte, “Perpetuating U.S. Preeminance,” 123.

<sup>249</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 262, 268.

<sup>250</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Vaclav Havel and George Bush in Washington,” (February 20, 1990), 4. Via Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard,” <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325688-Document-12-1-Memorandum-of-conversation-between>.

<sup>251</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 22.

<sup>252</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, Moscow (Excerpts),” (July 15, 1990), 4.

<sup>253</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 23.

given a “prominent role as the genesis of the new order.”<sup>254</sup> President Bush further strengthened this statement to Gorbachev in a telephone conversation following the NATO summit. During this summit in early July, Bush said, the idea “of an expanded, stronger CSCE with new institutions in which the USSR can share and be part of the new Europe” was disclosed.<sup>255</sup> The promise to expand the CSCE in which the Soviet Union could play a role was a smart response to the Soviet fears about their diminishing position in the international order, while also taking into account Soviet ideas about pan-European cooperation.

Lastly, U.S. and Western officials offered a transition period in the process of German reunification during which the GDR would have a special military status. On February 9, Gates proposed to Kryuchkov the idea of “a united Germany belonging to NATO but with no expansion of military presence to the GDR,” was worked out in the later stages of the negotiations.<sup>256</sup> After being incorporated into Baker’s Nine Points, the proposal entailed that NATO troops would not be stationed on the territory of the GDR, while Soviet troops remained there for an agreed upon period.<sup>257</sup> In the end, the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany recorded that the transition period would take four years, after which the former GDR territory would transform into NATO’s sphere. Moreover, it stated that “no nuclear weapon carriers” were allowed on former GDR soil.<sup>258</sup> Effectively, Sarotte summarises, Western delegates had managed to limit the future of NATO in only two ways: there would be no non-German troops and no nuclear weapons on former GDR soil.<sup>259</sup> Still, the Soviets were satisfied they could maintain their influence over the GDR for at least several years, and additionally, they would not be threatened by nuclear arms nearby.

Valentin Falin, Gorbachev’s advisor on German matters, greatly distrusted all of these Western reassurances, however. In a unique declassified memorandum from mid-April, he communicated his mistrust to Gorbachev. The goal of the West was, according to Falin, “clear to the naked eye – to isolate the USSR.”<sup>260</sup> He went on to argue that “[t]he West is outplaying us, promising to respect the interests of the USSR, but in practice ... [they are] separating us

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<sup>254</sup> “Opening Statement to the NATO Summit Meeting. Speech by Secretary General, Manfred Wörner,” (July 5, 1990).

<sup>255</sup> “Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush,” (July 17, 1990), 2.

<sup>256</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation between Robert Gates and Vladimir Kryuchkov in Moscow,” (February 9, 1990), 10.

<sup>257</sup> “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow,” (May 18, 1990), 22.

<sup>258</sup> “September 12 Two-Plus-Four Ministerial in Moscow: Detailed account [includes text of the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany and Agreed Minute to the Treaty on the special military status of the GDR after unification],” (November 2, 1990), 17-18.

<sup>259</sup> Sarotte, “Perpetuating U.S. Preeminance,” 133.

<sup>260</sup> “Valentin Falin Memorandum to Mikhail Gorbachev (Excerpts),” (April 18, 1990), 1.

from ‘traditional Europe’.”<sup>261</sup> Falin described that the West’s position was based on the American military doctrine of ‘forward basing’, aiming to use German territory to establish more military bases in Europe.<sup>262</sup> Declassified documents revealed that Falin was not entirely wrong. The U.S. had identified several strategic goals in Europe, as discussed previously, and it would be easier to achieve these goals without “forc[ing] the Soviets’ hand.”<sup>263</sup> So, U.S. and FRG officials agreed it was necessary to “de-demonize” NATO in the eyes of the Soviets.<sup>264</sup> A Scowcroft memorandum to Bush in late May explained this could be achieved through the establishment of a clear record of “reasonable attempts to take into account Soviet concerns.”<sup>265</sup> So, it seems that the Western negotiation demeanour was at least partly aimed at calming Soviet resistance to German membership of NATO and other Western goals.<sup>266</sup>

This all reveals why the U.S. and the FRG were willing to take into account Soviet interests, despite the strategic balance being dramatically in favour of the West. Defensive Realists provide an additional conceptual explanation. They argue that states worry about the future capabilities and motives of other states since these factors can bring the survival of the state in jeopardy. Therefore, states generally aim to eliminate those sources. Defensive Realists would explain that the Soviet delegates advocated for a pan-European security structure at least partly because this would help secure the survival of the Soviet state. U.S. officials, on the other hand, tried to please the Soviet delegation, as this would provide the right conditions to achieve their respective goals in Europe. These aims – such as establishing U.S. primacy in Europe – would preventively dismantle Soviet intentions, which in turn would help assure the security of the United States. In short, officials of both states decided to cooperate to ensure their state’s security and survival.

### *Interim Conclusion*

The strategic considerations of the negotiating parties were a central theme in the negotiations on German unification. While the Soviet Union feared for its survival due to its relative weakness and the increasingly political WTO, the U.S. valued 1990 as the right time to pursue

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>263</sup> “U.S. State Department, Two Plus Four: Advantages, Possible Concerns and Rebuttal Points,” (February 21, 1990), 4.

<sup>264</sup> Spohr and Reynolds, *Transcending the Cold War*, 214.

<sup>265</sup> “Memorandum from Scowcroft for the President: ‘Scope Paper—The Gorbachev Summit,’” (late May, 1990), 654.

<sup>266</sup> Nünlist, Aunesluoma, and Zogg, “The Road to the Charter of Paris,” 28.

its strategic goals in Europe. Throughout the negotiation process, the Soviets delegates often voiced their mounting security concerns, to which the U.S. officials generally replied reassuringly – most importantly in the form of Baker’s Nine Points. Moreover, the Soviets fervently advocated a pan-European security structure within the framework of the CSCE, which the U.S. delegation generally supported. However, a significant reason for the constructive demeanour of U.S. officials derived from a double agenda: the U.S. wanted to please the Soviets, as this would keep them from preventing the U.S. to fulfil its strategic goals in Europe. So, the Western delegates did their very best not to antagonise the Soviets and to acknowledge the latter’s security concerns. Importantly, it was in this context that Baker and other officials made their pledges to Soviet officials regarding the extension of the NATO zone eastwards. Thus, it appears that the ‘NATO promise’ was part of a broader Western strategy to convince the Soviets to consent to German membership of NATO.

Although the U.S. was in a relatively stronger position – the strategic balance was undoubtedly in favour of the White House – both parties opted for cooperation instead of confrontation. Defensive Realism, based on the premise that states strive to maximise their security and survival through more moderate means than violent conflict explains the puzzling behaviour of the negotiating parties as follows. By 1990, the Soviets would have undoubtedly lost any military confrontation with the West, due to the mounting domestic crises it was facing. According to a defensive Realist’s rationale, the Soviet officials opted for the more moderate means of cooperation to ensure the survival of the Soviet state. The relatively stronger U.S., on the other hand, could have rather easily overturned the Soviets, but instead, it chose more moderate means. For the U.S., a substantial reason was that cooperation meant a smaller chance of offending the Soviet party: the ‘safe’ option. This would create the right conditions to achieve their strategic goals in Europe – which in turn enlarged the security of the United States and the chances for its survival. Although defensive Realism has much explanatory power, it is important to remark that the beliefs and ideas of human decisionmakers such as Gorbachev also influenced the choice for cooperation – a factor many Realists tend to overlook.

## Conclusion

Throughout the last decade, the topic of the NATO promise has made a revival in both politics and academia. While officials used the alleged NATO promise to legitimise their political practices, scholars have repeatedly attempted to research whether or not the pledge was made in February 1990. This thesis has extensively researched the complex and dynamic context in which the NATO promise was allegedly made, as well as the positions and interests of the actors involved, in order to comprehend why the NATO promise remains a crucial topic to many in the academic and decision-making circles. Based on the study of a large number of primary sources – interpreted with theoretical concepts used as analytical tools – this thesis has deepened knowledge about three themes that recurred in the negotiations on German unification: historical arguments, dynamics of transition, and security considerations. Each theme explored positions, interests and other factors of influence on the individual, domestic, and international levels, thereby providing the thesis with a matrix-like analysis. It is essential to note that, due to its thematical approach, this thesis cannot give a decisive answer to the question whether or not a NATO promise was made – nor has that been the principal aim.

The negotiations on German unification, which took place in roughly the first half of 1990, were conducted by the FRG and the GDR, the U.S., the Soviet Union, France and Great-Britain – the so-called 2 + 4 framework. The central task of this process was to determine whether or not a unified Germany would join a military alliance, and if so, which one that would be. It was early in these negotiations that U.S. and FRG officials allegedly made a ‘NATO promise’ to the Soviet delegates, which, expressed on multiple occasions and in various phrasings, entailed that NATO would not expand eastwards, *grosso modo*.

From the outset of the negotiation process in February 1990, the Soviet delegation appeared ill-prepared and inconsistent. Much of this was due to problems within both the higher echelons of the Kremlin and the broader Soviet Union. As it happened, by 1990, Gorbachev experienced increasing opposition from Communist hard-liners and pragmatists within the CPSU. This division expressed itself during the negotiations on German unification, too. Gorbachev, both an idealist and a pragmatist, thought the Cold War could and should be overcome. Hence, he showed readiness to cooperate with the West and used much reconciliatory language. Decisively, he believed this cooperative route was an establishment of *perestroika*, and moreover, it could lead to the implementation of the common European home, a framework of wide-ranging cooperation across the European continent. His colleague-



negotiators, however, were more reticent. Falin, for instance, greatly distrusted the West's intentions, and Shevardnadze acted to rectify Gorbachev's statements on multiple occasions.

Additionally, the Kremlin was confronted with mounting domestic and transnational problems. Since the late 1980s, the Soviet Union had been in an economic free fall due to continuous negative growth, while it was also undergoing a series of uprisings in its republics and satellite states. These problems made the Soviet officials realise they could not keep up with the rapid pace with which history was unfolding, fearing the Soviet Union would lose its prominent position on the international stage. Importantly, the Soviet officials detected that the power balance was shifting in favour of the United States due to the relatively weakened position of the Soviet Union and the increasing politicisation of the WTO. In an attempt to revert these changes, the Soviet delegates continuously voiced their concerns, which were repetitively reassured by Western delegates. Moreover, the Soviets often emphasised their country's importance and uniqueness during the negotiations on German unification. Per illustration, the Soviet delegates repeatedly drew on the historical argument of their country's suffering in the Second World War – fitting the tendency in the Soviet identity to feel relatively deprived – to secure their say in the German unification process.

Contrastingly, the FRG and the U.S. had decided on a common position as early as late February, one they maintained throughout the negotiation process. The U.S. and the FRG were crucial to each other's interests and goals, and therefore, they closely cooperated during the negotiation process. The U.S. needed the support of the West Germans to retain its military bases in the FRG, and through those, its military presence on the European continent. The FRG on the other hand, needed the powerful U.S. on its side to secure full NATO membership for a united Germany. This was important to the U.S. as well, as it needed Germany within NATO's framework in order to legitimise its military bases there.

Despite their interdependence and overlapping goals, the positions of the U.S. and the FRG differed significantly. Above all, the U.S. had the covert goals to strengthen its strategic position in Europe and to end Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe. As the Cold War was nearing its end and the Soviet Union was rapidly losing ground, the U.S. delegates sensed a momentum to reach their objectives. By stimulating changes in the Soviet Union, the U.S. could push the strategic balance further in favour of the White House. However, during the physical negotiations, the U.S. officials communicated different incentives. A key historical argument to support U.S. involvement in the negotiation process was that the excessive violence in Europe in the twentieth century bore witness of the dangers of U.S. isolationism. Moreover, the

U.S. often emphasised that their military presence in Europe was vital, as it would safeguard stability on the continent – reflecting the U.S. national identity as the guardian of the free world.

The FRG, on the other hand, was primarily occupied with securing full NATO membership for a unified Germany. Moreover, it wanted U.S. military presence in Europe to secure stability on the continent. The West German delegates frequently employed historical arguments to strengthen their case. Most often, they argued that Germany's violent past has proven that Germany should not be neutral – an argument illustrative of the apologetic tendencies of the FRG delegation – but anchored in NATO instead. To further convince the Soviet delegation of German membership of NATO, the FRG offered considerable financial aid to the Soviets.

To reach their strategic goals, U.S. and FRG officials employed a joint negotiation strategy that deftly responded to the worries, weaknesses, and wishes of the Soviet delegation. Firstly, to satisfy Gorbachev, they used reconciliatory language to illustrate their apparent readiness to overcome Cold War hostilities, ameliorate East-West relations, increase pan-European cooperation, and to take Soviet security concerns into account. So, the Western delegates made the Soviets feel respected, which was a good match with the Soviet national identity, which holds that Soviets tends to feel relatively deprived. However, excessive utterances, although rare, reveal that the West was not as historically oblivious as the Soviet party was led to believe. Furthermore, the Western delegates regularly emphasised the speed with which events were evolving, as they were aware this caused great anxiety and recklessness in the Soviet camp. Additionally, the U.S. and the FRG often used Germany's violent past as an argument in favour of anchoring a united Germany within a NATO framework. Restricting Germany would prevent another major German-invoked violent conflict from happening, the Western delegates reasoned – which reacted to the Soviets' trauma from the Second World War. Moreover, U.S. and FRG officials continually reassured the security concerns the Soviets voiced, thereby convincing them that the West did not want to take advantage of the domestic difficulties the Soviet Union was experiencing. Additionally, the Western delegates communicated the willingness to make concessions regarding the GDR territory for a transitory period, which further pleased the Soviets. These tactics and offers can be interpreted as a reply to the concerns of the Soviet delegation regarding the weakening strategic position of the Soviet Union.

Accordingly, through a detailed analysis of the context in which the NATO promise was allegedly made, this thesis suggests that, during the negotiations on German unification, FRG and U.S. delegates made the Soviets believe that the West had no ill intentions. Their joint

negotiation strategy intended to rouse the Soviet delegation in favour of NATO membership for a united Germany, which confirms the notion of Savranskaya and Blanton. So, although they claimed to do otherwise, the FRG and U.S. delegations used the wishes and weaknesses of the Soviet Union to realise their own national goals. Therefore, this thesis largely confirms the notion of both Sarotte and Itzkowitz Shiffrin that the U.S. was occupied with ensuring its pre-eminence in post-Cold War Europe. However, this thesis also proves that the Soviets should not be considered victims, which confirms Smeets' central notion. Over the course of 1990, the Politburo was forcibly concerned with acute domestic and transnational crises, thus less able to discuss German membership of NATO. Therefore, it failed to decide on a common position, causing the Soviet delegation to be essentially paralysed during the negotiations on German unification. Furthermore, this thesis does not discredit Spohr's proposition that the 'NATO promise' was merely a proposal of the Western delegates to further the negotiation process, a standard diplomatic practice. Due to the considerable differences in political habits between East and West, such a proposal could have been interpreted the wrong way by the Soviets, accidentally creating the 'NATO promise'. Moreover, the chapter on historical arguments suggests that the negotiating parties seemed to be primarily occupied with anchoring Germany in a military alliance. This seems to underscore the proposition of Goldgeier and Adomeit that the NATO promise was made with regards to GDR territory, although this thesis cannot definitively confirm it.

So, the NATO promise, whether valid or not, can be viewed as a manifestation of the behaviour of the delegations during the negotiations on German unification. In this sense, the topic of the NATO promise is a 'historiographic hook' to which the broader interests and concerns of those actors involved in the German unification process can be hung. It strikingly reflects the key problems at the end of the Cold War – such as the military alliance of a unified German – as well as the positions and goals of the parties involved, which underscores the notion that the negotiation process on German reunification was a mirror subject for the broader context of '1990'.

With regards to the three schools of thought on the NATO promise as discussed in the introduction, the outcome of this research partly credits and partly discredits each. Still, due to its non-semantic and non-judicial approach, this thesis cannot give a decisive answer to whether or not a NATO promise was made during the negotiations on German unification. As for the dispute in official circles vis-à-vis the alleged NATO promise, this means neither the Russian nor the Western narrative is correct: the 'NATO promise' is neither a myth or a broken promise. Instead, this thesis suggests that both the Soviets and the Western parties are partly to

blame for creating the situation, and therefore, the highly politicised topic of debate of the NATO promise should be nuanced. Hence, this thesis helps to take the sting out of the debate, thereby creating a more constructive atmosphere for future discussion.

Although this thesis has deepened scholarly knowledge about the context of the alleged NATO promise, the historically unique period of ‘1990’, research on the topic is not yet saturated. Due to the continuing declassification of relevant primary sources, the NATO promise is a prime example of an evolving and lively debated research topic. Most importantly, there is more research to be done on sources from the former Soviet Union. Up until now, most research is – not in the least for practical reasons – based chiefly on non-Russian sources. Therefore, many valuable Soviet sources have not yet been researched satisfactorily. A prime example is an extensive collection of notes from the period 1985 until 1991 of CPSU Politburo members Anatoly Chernyaev, Vadim Medvedev and Georgi Shakhnov, which was released in 2006. This publication can provide valuable insight into the dynamics of Soviet decision-making during at the end of the Cold War, a crucial subject that nevertheless continues to be cloudy. Moreover, many former Soviet sources are yet to be declassified by the Kremlin. It is plausible, however, that these sources will not give an impartial and decisive answer to whether or not a NATO promise was made, given the significance of the ‘NATO promise’ narrative to contemporary Russian politics.

The events of 1990 proved to be of great historical significance. As Scowcroft recalled in a 1999 interview, “nothing could be more symbolic of the end [of the division of Europe] than the unification of Germany inside NATO.”<sup>267</sup> The unification of Germany triggered the end of the Cold War, and the world was slowly adapting to this radical change. Although 1990 marked the starting point of a period of relative peace, hostilities between East and West failed to cease permanently.

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<sup>267</sup> “Brent Scowcroft Oral History, National Security Advisor,” 84.

## Epilogue

The alleged NATO promise remains a crucial topic in contemporary Russian-Western relations, which are more problematic now than they have been since the Cold War. President Putin has repeatedly claimed that the West one-sidedly deceived Soviet officials during the negotiations on German unification, which – in Putin’s eyes – provides him with an additional legitimisation for Russia’s fairly bold current foreign policy. NATO member states, on the other hand, deny these claims as part of a larger strategy to oppose Russia. Although this thesis could not give a decisive answer to whether or not a NATO promise was made, it does offer indications on the matter.

In the author’s opinion, this research has indicated that the FRG and U.S. officials have made no legitimate promise not to expand NATO towards Eastern Europe during the negotiations on German unification. This means that, as Kristina Spohr phrased, “if no *de jure* pledges were made, no pledges could have been broken or ‘betrayed’,” thereby discrediting Russian claims.<sup>268</sup> Nothing in this thesis or the preliminary research indicated that the U.S. or the FRG had plans to extend NATO to East European soil: it appeared not once in either bilaterals or internal documents.<sup>269</sup> Moreover, the negotiating parties were fully occupied with anchoring a reunified Germany, due to the latter’s violent historical record. As the primary goal of the negotiating parties was to restrict the new Germany, there was no sign that any party was paying attention to a possible expansion of NATO beyond the borders of a unified Germany. What is more, the Warsaw Treaty Organisation still existed in 1990. Although it was unquestionably weakening, it showed no signs of dissolving during the negotiations on German unification, making it less likely that NATO considered expanding towards WTO member states at the time. Therefore, it is more plausible that the ‘NATO promise’ referred to the not-stationing of NATO troops to East German soil, as James Goldgeier and Hannes Adomeit uphold. So, concludingly, this thesis has found no evidence of a legitimate NATO promise that pledged not to expand the alliance to Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, the Russian complaint that it has been betrayed by the West has a grain of truth. The joint negotiation strategy of the FRG and the U.S. appears to have been directed at completing those two state’s objectives. That in itself is hardly surprising. Malignant is, however, that from the outset of the negotiation process, the West deliberately seemed to give

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<sup>268</sup> Spohr, “Precluded or Precedent-Setting?,” 51.

<sup>269</sup> It is important to note here that I use the contemporary meaning of ‘Eastern Europe’, which does not include the GDR.

the Soviet delegates a wrong impression of the West's intentions. Per illustration, the U.S. and the FRG continuously employed reconciliatory language and voiced they wanted increased cooperation with Moscow. Furthermore, Kohl offered the much-needed money to Gorbachev, for which he wanted hardly anything in return. Moreover, the Western delegates assured the Soviets that they would take into account the Kremlin's strategic concerns, including the imprecise proposals that became known as the 'NATO promise'. The Western delegations thus aptly played to the Soviets' concerns and desires, leading the Soviets to believe that the FRG and the U.S. would not take advantage of the poor condition the Soviet Union found itself, thereby attenuating the Soviets' diplomatic vigilance even further. So, it seems, the Western negotiation strategy was aiming to mollify Soviet opposition to NATO membership for a united Germany – the West's core objective, as well as the prerequisite for achieving other national goals. One could even argue that the negotiations on German unification stood in the service of reaching the strategic goals of the most powerful state involved: the United States. So, the FRG and the U.S. violated their carefully constructed "spirit of 1990," as Joshua Itzkowitz Shiffrin named it, thereby severely damaging the Soviets' trust.<sup>270</sup>

Still, the Soviets can also be held partly responsible. Admittedly, the Soviet decision-makers had a lot on their plate. But Gorbachev, it seemed, had a somewhat naïve tendency to see the world through rose-coloured glasses – as Gorbachev's biographer William Taubman strikingly summarised: "[W]hile Gorbachev's country was coming apart in 1990, he was trying to bring the world together."<sup>271</sup> Still, the chief Soviet officials had a negligent attitude regarding the German question and lacked the political instinct that could sense hidden intentions – a lethal combination that created the chance to be overturned by their Western counterparts. Therefore, I agree with Smeets' proposition that it is untrue that the West one-sidedly deceived the Soviets.

It rarely happens that one side wins as much in a negotiation as the U.S. did in the negotiations on German unification. In combination with the tendency of the Russian national identity to feel relatively deprived by the West, the uneven outcome of this process lay the groundworks of the current, complicated relations between Russia and the West. As of 2018, NATO has plans for expanding towards four additional Central and Eastern European states, thereby continuing to pose understandable security threats for Russia. In the near future, therefore, NATO enlargement will become no less of a conundrum.

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<sup>270</sup> Itzkowitz Shiffrin, "Deal or No Deal?," 11.

<sup>271</sup> Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times*, 540.

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## List of Abbreviations

|       |  |
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| BOHP  | George H. W. Bush Oral History Project |
| CWIHP | Cold War International History Project |
| NATO  | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation     |
| NSA   | National Security Archive              |

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## Figures

### *Cartoon*

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

### *Map*

*Wikimedia Commons*. "Cold war Europe military alliances map." Last modified May 20, 2012. [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/02/Cold\\_war\\_europe\\_military\\_alliances\\_map\\_en.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/02/Cold_war_europe_military_alliances_map_en.png).