FOREIGN AFFAIRS

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1996

REVIEW ESSAY

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The Fabulous Bush and Baker Boys

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VOLUME 75 · NUMBER 1

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Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft. BY PHILIP ZELIKOW AND CONDOLEEZZA RICE. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, 493 pp. $35.00.

Name the three greatest moments in the history of American statecraft. The first, the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, is surely beyond debate. For a mere $15 million and without shedding a drop of blood, President Thomas Jefferson more than doubled the size of the United States. With a brilliant mix of bluff and bluster, Jefferson not only outmaneuvered three great powers—France, Britain, and Spain—but also removed them as threats to the future expansion of the young republic. Those Americans "conquer without war," wrote the French envoy Louis Marie Turreau, expressing his surly admiration for the clever diplomacy of the Yankee upstarts.

The decade after World War II also deserves a five-star ranking. Indeed, 1945-55 is the golden age of American foreign policy, even though gainsayers would downplay the quality of U.S. diplomacy, pointing to America's towering predominance.[1] In those years the United States focused on building a strong institutional framework, reflected in an alphabet soup of acronyms: U.N., IMF, OEEC, WEU, ECSC, GATT, NATO, plus subsidiary alliances such as SEATO and CENTO. Add to that list the rearmament of West Germany in 1955, which completed the NATO structure. Those who pooh-pooh these institutions as instances of pactomania or imperialism miss the point. The secret of their success lay in their transcendence: dedicated to the common welfare, they served American interests by serving those of others. No other hegemonic power—from Rome to

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George Bush and Helmut Kohl, one month after reunification.

Great Britain—had so profitably hitched its national interests to the well-being of other nations.

The third period deserving at least a magna cum laude coincides with the presidency of a most unlikely candidate, George Bush. Though he could never quite get his sentences straight, from 1989 to 1993 he presided over an extraordinary chapter in American diplomacy. First, a great power—the Soviet Union—expired peacefully on his watch. Yet as Martin Wight, the British student of international politics, has put it, a great power never "dies in its bed"; before breathing their last, the losers have historically unleashed a major war. Second, though with a little help from his friend Margaret Thatcher, Bush masterminded the Persian Gulf War coalition against Iraq's Saddam Hussein. This achievement is particularly impressive considering that the alliance harnessed not only the cranky French, but also a slew of Arab states not often enamored of the United States or one another. Washington relegated Israel, bridling under Iraqi Scud missile attacks, to the sidelines and deftly extracted billions of dollars in tribute from the two notorious fence sitters, Germany and Japan.

[1] Although America was also the uncontested number one in 1918, nobody would bestow such accolades on U.S. foreign policy from Wilson to Hoover. Nor has excellence marked American diplomacy since 1992, when the United States has been said to be the "sole remaining superpower."

The final masterly feat of this phase was German reunification. All of Germany in the West—that was a dream that seemed to have died for good in 40 years of Cold War. Its absurdity had become an article of faith. It was widely thought that the Soviet Union would never yield the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the very brace of its empire in Eastern Europe; no matter how exhausted, it would not swallow so brutal a revision of the balance of power in Europe. At best the Soviet Union would accept confederation or neutralization in the guise of a NATO-dissolving European security structure. And yet Mikhail Gorbachev did let go, and by 1994 the last Russian troops had left the country that had been the chief cause and venue of the tensest moments of the Cold War.

GORBACHEV'S BUNGLE

In *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed,* Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, two Bush administration officials now ensconced in Harvard and Stanford respectively, record the diplomatic maneuvering behind the reunification of Germany. Their book comes a bit late in the game but was well worth the wait. Previously we have had to rely on memoirs by the actors themselves or on accounts by academics and journalists, which suffer from the usual drawbacks. Participants tend to burnish the record, while outsiders must rely on public sources and on interviews with officials who like to add to the gloss.

Zelikow and Rice, National Security Council staffers at the time, were also involved in the events they describe, and they too cite public sources and private interviews. But they had two enormous advantages. As the preface notes, Zelikow had access to the relevant State Department, White House, and intelligence documents. Moreover, as the authors' research proceeded, East German and Soviet state archives began to crack open, yielding, for instance, papers prepared for the Soviet Politburo. With these revealing sources, the authors shaved decades off the 25 or 50 years that normally stand between the historian and the official documents; some of the American records they used remain classified to this day. With more than a hundred pages of notes, the book is a rich quarry for contemporary historians.

How was Germany reunified? The first answer has nothing to do with the finesse of the fabulous Bush and Baker boys but much to do with the thickness of the Gorbachev crowd. In the fall of 1989, when not all dies had been cast, Gorbachev committed a blunder that will eventually rank alongside such historic bloopers as Napoleon III's declaration of war on Prussia in 1870 and Saddam's refusal to grab any of a dozen diplomatic opportunities to stop the American war machine in its tracks. Failing to authorize force against the gathering East German crowds in October 1989, as the Honecker regime demanded, or to brandish the first commandment of bipolarity—no tilting of the balance—at the West, Gorbachev grievously miscalculated.

Taking a cue from Trotsky, Gorbachev did not believe in "perestroika in one country." He identified the fate of his endeavor in the Soviet Union with renewal all the way to the Elbe; reforming the empire was, he fancied, the best way to retain it. East Germany, of course, was the most critical gamble, for it allowed Moscow to encircle and contain the unruly

rest. But East Germany, a non-nation, was also the worst place for controlled change—indeed, a mission impossible. If the GDR was to move toward democratic self-determination, it could only collapse into the arms of the "real" German state, the Federal Republic.

Still, Gorbachev's bungle was understandable. Like the bulk of the West German political class—especially the chattering class—he believed that the GDR had become "real," that "the other German state" was here to stay, particularly because all Bonn governments from Brandt to Kohl had scrupulously deferred to Soviet sensibilities by basing their Ostpolitik on the incantation, "two states in one nation." Nor was Mikhail Sergeyevich alone in placing so sanguine a bet. As this book recounts in great detail, Margaret Thatcher was adamant about braking, if not stopping, unification; French President François Mitterrand, delivering sibylline homilies, certainly hoped for the same; and West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and for a while even Helmut Kohl himself, were either too confused or too scared to commit.

The second explanation for the fortuitous denouement is George Bush or, more accurately, his right instincts at the right time. Egged on by Kohl, and against the advice of National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and Secretary of State James Baker, Bush went on record as early as October 24, 1989—16 days before the fall of the wall—with a verbal volley heard round the world: "I don't share the concern that some European countries have about a reunified Germany." By moving out in front, Washington did what should come naturally (Mr. Clinton, please take note) to the sole remaining superpower. By forcing the pace, Bush grabbed hold of the baton; by siding with Kohl, he tightened the bond with the soon-to-be number one power in Europe; and by securing both Bonn and the baton, the United States clinched control over the Western orchestra. Even à deux, France and Britain were too weak to impose a dissonant melody, and since Bonn could rely only on Washington, the United States acquired ample leverage over Germany to prevent it from playing solo in those heady but treacherous days.

CATASTROPHE AVERTED

The Soviet Union was the next—and most critical—problem. Because Gorbachev had blundered badly during the overture, he might try even harder to recoup his losses later. In a December 1989 meeting with Genscher, after Kohl had sprung his Ten Point Plan for confederation on a startled world, Gorbachev railed about a German "ultimatum, a diktat." Did Kohl think he could recast Europe on his own? This was exactly what the British and French were asking. "Perhaps," Gorbachev snarled, "he thinks that his melody, the melody of his march, is already playing and he is already marching to it."

For diplomatic history aficionados, these sections of the book, though rendered in measured prose, read almost like a thriller. The players could no longer foresee, let alone forestall, the next day's events as Europe's deep-frozen structures began to crack open. While the once stolid but now giddy West Germans swiftly and fecklessly forged ahead, the Soviets were digging in for battle, warning that Europe could again come to "ruin on German soil," in the

words of Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. The climate, as even Kohl noted, was turning "icy."

In the meantime, the GDR, an artfully decorated Potemkin village, was collapsing, with emigration shooting up to 60,000 per month, twice the rate that had prompted the Berlin Wall in 1961. Clearly it was now up to the United States to coax, reassure, and constrain the Soviet Union. Exploiting their comparative advantage, Zelikow and Rice describe in fine detail the debates and battles inside the foreign policy apparatus—within and between State and the National Security Council. In the end, boldness won again, and U.S. policy proceeded on the (correct) premise that "reunification was coming rapidly, not gradually." The task, not exactly a small one, was threefold: avert a German solo run to Moscow, do not drive the Soviets to desperation, and bring a united Germany into NATO.

The first part was the easiest. The United States, as Bush wrote to Kohl, would not "allow the Soviet Union ... to force you to create the kind of Germany Moscow might want, at the pace Moscow might prefer." By supporting Bonn, the United States was able to determine both the speed and the direction of West German policy. After some equivocation, Bonn decided that a quick and dirty deal with Moscow was not its best course, and so Genscher, though drawn by penchant and practice to obfuscation, declared at the end of January 1990, "We do not want a united Germany that is neutral."[2]

How would the United States cushion the blow for the loser? "The odds of success seemed long," write the authors, "but the United States set its sights on creating a dignified way out for Moscow to accept the unraveling of its presence and its authority in the new Europe." The Soviets scrambled to regain their footing, demanding a long transition period synchronized with moves toward their ancient goal, an "overarching" European security structure sans alliances in which the Soviet Union, by dint of propinquity and size, would predominate. Certainly a reunified Germany could not be part of NATO; that would be an "unacceptable shift in the balance of power," Gorbachev adviser Vadim Zagladin warned the Americans.

Perhaps the Americans (and the Germans) were just lucky, for in mid-July Gorbachev "decided to settle the German issue and put it behind him." Was it whim or wisdom, folly or an uncanny insight into the inevitability of history? Clio's disciples will endlessly debate this point. But the American team had to act in the here and now, and lucky or not, they discharged their task with uncommon virtuosity.

GERMANY UNIFIED

Bush, Baker, and their select group of advisers knew when to push and when to stop, when to flatter and when to cajole, when to build the Soviets up and when to slap them down. Yes, Moscow would get U.S. trade concessions, but it would have to lift its blockade of Lithuania. A smaller *Bundeswehr* was a reasonable demand, as

[2] However, Genscher continued to insist on "one-third neutralization," a plan which proposed that East German territory be demilitarized and kept outside NATO's bounds. "No reasonable person," he claimed, "could expect the Soviet Union to accept ... an outcome" whereby "the borders of NATO could be moved up 300 kilometers eastward, via German reunification." Yet that is, of course, exactly what happened.

was Moscow's insistence on keeping its troops in eastern Germany for a few years, but then all of Germany would end up in NATO. American troops in Germany? They would stay in sizable numbers—to reassure both Germany and its neighbors, including the Soviet Union. United Germany would forswear nuclear weapons, but NATO's Nuclear Planning Group, in which the Germans participated in deployment and the formulation of doctrine, would remain sacrosanct. Conventional arms cuts? By all means, but they would have to be asymmetrical to make up for Moscow's geographic advantage. A nuclear drawdown? The United States could eliminate its short-range missiles and nuclear artillery shells but could not undermine "extended deterrence," America's nuclear shelter for its European allies.

It all came together in NATO's "London Declaration" of July 6, 1990, which the United States successfully maneuvered past Europe's skeptics and naysayers. "I want you to know," wrote Bush to Gorbachev, with more sincerity than felicity, "that [the Declaration] was written with you importantly in mind." It opened up NATO to the east without yielding an inch on the age-old Soviet demand for its dissolution; NATO would be transformed but not sacrificed on the altar of German reunification. Gorbachev and other Eastern European leaders would be invited to NATO headquarters, and permanent liaison institutions would be created. No more first use; nuclear weapons would be demoted to a "last resort." With his surefooted instinct for Gorbachev's vanities and vulnerabilities, Bush also told the general secretary "how much he admired the way you have handled the burgeoning democratic process in your country." Certainly this "NATO summit meeting . . . will push U.S.-Soviet relations to an even higher plane."

Summing up, Zelikow and Rice report, "The allies awaited Moscow's reply. They did not have to wait long." When Kohl arrived in the Soviet Union on July 15, the bargain was all but sealed. His legendary tête-à-tête with Gorbachev in Stavropol and in the Caucasian countryside, when the Soviet president let go completely by consenting to Germany-in-NATO without delay, did not turn into a "Stavrapallo" for a simple reason. The Germans could not reenact the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo and shift the balance of power in Europe because they ran on a long but strong leash that Washington held. And they did not have to accept a collusive pact with Moscow because the United States had run interference for them all the way to the goal line. One wonders whether Mitterrand and Thatcher, tortured by their archaic memories of Germany, ever entirely understood what Bush had done for them in those critical nine months. Kohl grasped the precious gift the Americans had delivered. As he put it in another context, the Americans were "completely reliable. One could not wish for stronger support; he would not forget it."

Bush and his team deserve the highest marks—not for a simple exercise in Diplomacy 101 but for a superb performance under the most treacherous of circumstances. This time a great power did die in bed. This time German unity was achieved not by a war that, as in 1870-71, would poison Europe for a century but instead with the benign consent of all neighbors, large and small. The United States did not just finesse and finagle; as

in the years after World War II, it built a foundation for European order that promises to endure. And if Europe ever goes sour again, historians will not be able to point to American failures in 1989-90, as they rightly do with respect to 1919-20.

Nor could this accomplishment have found more astute chroniclers than Zelikow and Rice. Though actors in the drama, they resist (with far more modesty than one would expect) the temptation to train the spotlight on themselves. Naturally they quote voluminously from the American script and highlight the American performance. But they also, ever so discreetly, penetrate the makeup, revealing the warts beneath, the struggles and rivalries within. And as they focus on the others—Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, Mitterrand and Thatcher, Kohl and Genscher—they give credit where credit is due, evading the urge to settle accounts. Yet the careful reader will find plenty of subtle hints about the identity of the fools, knaves, and heroes, tragic and ironic, in this play.

Germany Unified and Europe Transformed will for many years remain the definitive treatise on German reunification and on a brilliant chapter in the annals of American statecraft. Indeed, it will—or at least should—be read as a standard textbook. It is a case study in excellence: how to play the multidimensional chess game of diplomacy, a vexing contest that America, alternately idealistic, cynical, or simply oblivious, rarely savors and frequently forfeits.