From the Shadow of Reagan: George Bush and the End of the Cold War.

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FROM THE SHADOW OF REAGAN:
GEORGE BUSH AND THE END OF THE COLD WAR

A Dissertation

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Louisiana State University and
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in partial fulfillment of the
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in

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by
Christopher Alan Maynard
B.A., Lee University, 1994
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1997
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Abstract

George Bush entered the presidency constantly compared and contrasted with his predecessor, Ronald Reagan. Lacking Reagan's eloquence and adept use of the media, Bush was lambasted by the press as Reagan's "lapdog" and labeled a "wimp." The press pushed Bush to establish themes to match policy goals and to use the bully pulpit to lead the national debate on issues. His refusal prompted journalists to characterize the Bush presidency as lacking an agenda. Reagan's success with the media and Bush's failure have produced a misconception about the successes and failures of each president's policies. Thus, the period usually is referred to as the "Reagan-Bush years," indicating that Bush's term can best be explained as Reagan's third term. This distinction is partly a result of the misconception that the Cold War was basically over by the end of the Reagan administration and that Bush merely signed agreements Reagan had already negotiated. This ignores the instability of the Soviet Union, as well as the potentially explosive situation in Central and Eastern Europe, that still existed when Reagan left office.

This dissertation explores how differences between Ronald Reagan and George Bush affected the end of the Cold War, examining Bush's use of the media, the restructuring of the National Security Council, the subsequent fundamental shift in foreign policy approach to the Soviet Union, and the use of personal diplomacy in the reunification of Germany and the breakup of the Soviet Union. Bush led a transition: a transition from the Cold War to a post-Cold War world. Bush's diplomatic strengths proved as great as his media skills and domestic agenda were weak. Bush and his
advisors managed the end of the Cold War, helping it end not with a bang, but a peaceful whimper. This dissertation is funded by a Peter and Edith O’Donnell Grant from the George Bush Presidential Library Foundation and is based on interviews with Bush administration officials such as Brent Scowcroft, James Baker, Colin Powell, Marlin Fitzwater, and Jack Matlock, plus many recently declassified documents.
Introduction

The end of the Cold War has brought about a reinvigoration of the debate over how historians examine the Cold War period. John Lewis Gaddis, in particular, has drawn a distinction between “old” Cold War history and “new” Cold War history. Before the end of the Cold War, Gaddis suggests, American historians gave the United States disproportionate attention, wrote a history of a war before they knew the outcome, and emphasized interests, which they defined in material terms. Gaddis views these as deficiencies and welcomes the “new” Cold War history, with its multiarchival attempt to draw upon the records of all major participants, its ability to place the Cold War within a broader comparative framework because it knows both the beginning and the end, and its emphasis on ideas—what people believed, or wanted to believe. Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman hails the New Diplomatic History as making a “contribution to a fuller representation of American life by portraying the interaction between the United States and the rest of the world and then tightly braiding that story together with both domestic and world history.” But in many respects, much of the “new” Cold War history is a reconceptualization of older approaches to the study of American foreign relations that have been around since its inception. In reality, there is little that is methodologically new in the “new” Cold War history approaches. In a rush to produce a truly international history, behavior of western leaders has been neglected in favor of revelations from the archives of the former Soviet Union. Although Gaddis hails this as “affirmative action,” it has distorted the current view of the Bush administration in
particular, one covered almost entirely by “new” Cold War historians.2 The Cold War can now be placed in its historical context. Members of Reagan’s and Bush’s foreign policymaking apparatus, however, did not know the outcome nor were they privy to archival information now available. They made their decisions and shaped policies with the same blinders that Gaddis sees as deficiencies of the “old” Cold War historians. Modern Cold War historians, whether “old” or “new,” should place the Cold War within its proper context and examine the decisions made by people at the highest levels, remembering the perceptions under which the participants at the time operated. This requires a synthesis of the two approaches. Finally, the importance of ideas over interests that is advocated by much of the “new” Cold War history has produced a distorted picture of the final years of the Cold War. As Gaddis explains:

The ‘new’ Cold War history will take ideas seriously: here the way the conflict ended is bound to reshape our view of how it began and evolved. For the events of 1989-91 make sense only in terms of ideas. There was no military defeat or economic crash; but there was a collapse of legitimacy. The people of one Cold War empire suddenly realized that its emperors had no clothes on. As in the classic tale, though, the insight resulted from a shift in how people thought, not from any change in what they saw.3

According to this view, the participants were only important in regards to the ideas that they promoted. That is why Reagan and Gorbachev, who embraced strong ideological rhetoric, are seen as the major players and why Bush, who, in the words of his press secretary, “didn’t give a damn about his public image,” was seen as a

non-factor. This view discounts the type of practical diplomatic negotiations that led to the end of the division of Europe and neglects the fact that decisions were made for purely political or economic reasons rather than because of ideology. This is not meant to diminish the importance of ideology during this period but simply to underscore that ideology alone does not explain the end of the Cold War. The Cold War was a process that only came to an end when there was a resolution of the ideological differences as well as the material interests of both sides. This study seeks to examine that process to determine what role the Bush administration played in ending the Cold War.

The end of the Cold War is a process that has engendered much debate among specialists in the history of foreign relations; to the general public it is quite simple. A political event, the end of the Cold War is seen as the action of personality. Causation is thus reduced to the story of Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush:

(1) The defense buildup and Cold War rhetoric of Reagan’s foreign policy convinced the Soviet Union that it could not win an arms race. Despite Reagan’s stern talk about the Soviet Union being “an evil empire,” he was determined to reach an arms control agreement with the Soviets.

(2) Gorbachev represented a new generation of Soviet leaders. He set about to aggressively improve East-West foreign relations in order to free his energies and financial resources so that he could address pressing domestic problems.

(3) By the time Bush came to office, the Cold War was winding down. A caretaker president, Bush simply continued the policies set by Reagan, finished negotiating the arms treaties, and performed some simple “clean-up” diplomacy.

Such an explanation distorts the end of the Cold War. It personalizes complex situations and processes and obscures the truth that the participants often had complicated motives and confused, often contradictory, objectives. As a result, such

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4 Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.
symbolic explanation does not adequately portray the process by which the political actors ended the Cold War. Historians must, however, examine symbolic language so that a clear perception of the end of the Cold War emerges. Some authors rushed books to press before the Cold War had even concluded. Others simply updated earlier work to include a few new chapters on the last years of the Cold War. None of these books examine the Bush presidency carefully. Books that focus on Bush attack his deficiencies in domestic policy and his inability to deal with the press. The books written about George Bush and foreign affairs centered almost exclusively on the Persian Gulf War. One of the few exceptions is Michael Beschloss and Strobe Talbott’s book, *At the Highest Levels*, which attempts to describe the last few years of the Cold War. It is based entirely on interviews with officials for whom the authors will neither name nor provide transcripts. Almost a decade after these interviews were conducted, they remain closed. The one area where there has been a wealth of

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published material concerning the Bush administration and the end of the Cold War has come in the form of a multitude of memoirs, diaries, and papers of Bush administration officials.⁠⁠¹⁰ There have also been several memoirs from foreign officials that figured prominently in the ending of the Cold War.⁠⁠¹¹ Supporting these accounts has been the release of many official documents from both American and Soviet archives. This dissertation draws on these sources, plus the author’s interviews with prominent Bush administration officials, such as James Baker, Brent Scowcroft, Colin Powell, Jack Matlock, and Marlin Fitzwater, to gain a clearer understanding of the process that led to the end of the Cold War.

George Bush entered the presidency constantly compared and contrasted with his predecessor, Ronald Reagan. Lacking Reagan’s eloquence and adept use of the media, Bush was lambasted by the press as Reagan’s “lapdog” and labeled a “wimp.” The press pushed Bush to be more Reaganesque: to establish themes to match policy goals and to use the bully pulpit to lead national debate. His refusal to make thematic addresses and create a “line of the day” for daily news cycles prompted journalists to

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characterize the Bush presidency as lacking an agenda. One difficulty that the Bush staff encountered in attempts to create a positive media image originated in the fact that Bush did not like being “handled.” Unlike Reagan, who would meticulously memorize entire speeches written by his advisors, Bush rarely stayed faithful to a prepared text, preferring merely to use it as an outline from which he would ad lib. This provided ample room for mistakes as well as unfocused messages that did not make clear the administration’s agenda. Too much access compounded the problem: Bush held more than 280 twenty-minute press conferences open to questions on any subject. Bush was more accessible to the media than any other modern president before him, yet he has been viewed as failing miserably in his relations with the press, especially when compared to Reagan. The problem lay in how each man viewed the role of media. Bush felt that it was his obligation to meet with the press, a task to be endured, a task less important than governing. Reagan, on the other hand, relished the time he spent in front of audiences and the camera and utilized the media to promote a positive image of himself and his policies. Reagan’s success with the media and Bush’s failure have produced a misconception about the success and failure of each president’s policies, especially in foreign policy where most Americans’ opinions are based on information filtered through the media. Part of Bush’s problem was of his own making. During his term as vice president, Bush refused to disagree publicly with President Reagan, even during the Iran-Contra Affair. One of the main drawbacks of Bush’s quiet loyalty to Reagan was that it did not allow him to establish a strong image that was distinct and independent of Reagan. His weak image intensified during the 1988 election when Bush billed himself as the candidate of continuity. The vice
president who had faithfully served an enormously popular president pledged to continue in his footsteps. Bush won the election of 1988 on the strength of Reagan’s popularity, along with negative campaign ads attacking his inept Democratic opponent, Michael Dukakakis. The campaign rhetoric, however, did more than just win Bush the election—it shaped how the public, and many historians, viewed these years. Thus, the period is usually referred to as simply the “Reagan-Bush years,” indicating that Bush’s term can best be explained as Reagan’s third term. This is partly a result of the misconception that the Cold War was basically over by the end of the Reagan administration and that Bush merely signed agreements Reagan had already negotiated. This ignores the instability of the Soviet Union, as well as the potentially explosive situation in Central and Eastern Europe that still existed when Reagan left office. This image was compounded by Bush’s poor media skills, a subject central to this dissertation.

Bush did not merely continue on the foreign policy path set by Reagan. He made a fundamental shift in foreign policy regarding the Soviet Union. Determined to make his own mark, Bush appointed Brent Scowcroft, a vocal critic of the way the Reagan administration had managed foreign policy, as his national security advisor. During arms control negotiations, Reagan emphasized numbers, eliminating certain kinds of weapons. Scowcroft believed that simply getting rid of certain kinds of weapons did not achieve the overall goal of arms control, which was to improve stability. Instead, he wanted to reduce the chances that in a crisis either side would resort to the use of nuclear weapons for fear of some vulnerability in the nuclear arsenal. This goal could not be accomplished simply by a shift in numbers. He wanted
to shift the focus from arms control to Eastern Europe, to encourage the Red Army to leave Eastern Europe. This meant de-emphasizing arms control until the situation in Eastern Europe unfolded, something that would require a fundamental change in U.S. foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. Bush gave Scowcroft the authority needed to make such a change by issuing National Security Directive 1, which reorganized the National Security Council. Bush’s years of experience in foreign affairs led to a more hands-on approach markedly different than Reagan’s desire to delegate foreign policy decision-making authority. Bush enjoyed debating issues with his advisors. He asked question after question, provoking people to defend their views. This helped him clarify the issues in his own mind and allowed him to make what he felt were prudent, well-reasoned decisions. This was a markedly different process than that which occurred during the Reagan administration. Reagan’s seventh national security advisor, Colin Powell, described Reagan’s National Security Council as “rudderless, drifting, demoralized.”12 Reagan downgraded the post of national security advisor shortly after taking office. For the first time since the National Security Council’s creation in 1947, the national security advisor lost direct access to the president. Reagan made clear that the State Department would handle foreign affairs decisions in his administration while the National Security Administration would “integrate” policies proposed by the State Department. Reagan established a complex web of planning groups that allowed officials, such as Colonel Oliver North, to establish personal domains. Lack of cooperation became evident during the Iran-Contra Affair. Bush’s National Security Council, conversely, was an inner circle of highly

12 John Barry and Evan Thomas, “Colin Powell: Behind the Myth,” Newsweek, 5
experienced men who enjoyed Bush's complete confidence. At the center were Brent Scowcroft and Secretary of State James Baker, both of whom, along with the president, would prove to be the chief architects of Bush's foreign policy. These three men, who had been friends since their days working in the Ford administration, formed an experienced triumvirate that ensured foreign policy decisions would be made only at the highest levels.

The Bush administration decided to conduct a comprehensive review of U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union. The press interpreted the "pause" as another sign of Bush's lack of vision. In 1988-89, as the United States entered a critical period of foreign policy, many pundits wondered if Bush was the right man to replace Reagan. Bush had to prove to the press, accustomed to the public, charismatic styles of Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, that his private, quiet style of diplomacy could be effective. Bush spent most of the summer of 1989 addressing the changes that were taking place in Central and Eastern Europe. He did not urge ferment in Eastern Europe. Instead, he encouraged incremental reform at a pace not threatening to the Soviets. Bush hoped to promote change, not direct intervention. Bush made two European trips to further this goal. The first, in the spring of 1989, was to Western Europe and coincided with the NATO summit scheduled to celebrate the organization's fortieth anniversary. The second was in the summer of 1989 and focused on Eastern Europe, ending with the G-7 economic summit in Paris. These two presidential trips, along with domestic speeches scheduled for the commencement season, gave the administration the opportunity to lay out its new policy initiatives and

March 2001, 36.
put pressure on other governments to respond. This was, in reality, a diplomatic offensive that finally allowed the new administration to break free from the Reagan-era policies and forge a new course more in line with Scowcroft's goal of capitalizing on ferment in Eastern Europe. On November 9, 1989, East Germany relaxed its border-control policy with West Germany. Bush received news of the fall of the Berlin Wall with much personal pleasure, but in public expressed caution. He feared that a Western celebration of the wall's collapse might encourage a backlash by hard-liners in East Berlin and Moscow. To a skeptical public, Bush's actions built upon the images created by his lengthy foreign policy review and upon his timid reaction to the Tiananmen Square massacre. This indicated that Bush, as a symbolic leader, could not follow in the steps of Reagan. What the public did not know was that Bush was acting on a request sent to him by Gorbachev that very day. Bush hoped that his acquiescence to Gorbachev's request would prove fruitful in the meeting the two men were scheduled to share the following month. In December 1989, during a historic meeting in Malta, Bush sought to test the intentions of the Soviet Union, to move beyond the Containment Doctrine that had dominated U.S. Cold War policy, and to establish a new relationship with the Soviet Union. The U.S.-Soviet relationship that was fostered by Malta would be essential in ensuring that reform meant political and economic progress rather than chaos and disorder. George Bush's quiet style achieved what he most wanted—the peaceful transfer of power in Eastern Europe.

President Bush used the new U.S.-Soviet relationship that he had forged at Malta to gain Soviet acceptance of a unified Germany within NATO. This acceptance occurred over a period of months involving private meetings, letters, and phone
conversations between leaders from both the East and West. Personal diplomacy proved decisive. Bush used personal diplomacy to achieve what had seemed unthinkable. Convincing the Soviet Union to allow a unified Germany to remain in NATO was an important foreign policy achievement for the Bush administration. To achieve this goal, the United States created the Two-Plus-Four plan, which provided a diplomatic process for carrying out rapid reunification in a way that everyone accepted. The first step was to unite Western leaders. Bush accomplished this through extensive meetings, letters, and telephone conversations with Western leaders. This was particularly important in relations with Helmut Kohl. Bush had to make sure that the Germans would remain in NATO. Bush ensured Kohl’s partnership by offering him full support for his plan for German reunification. The Bush-Kohl meeting at Camp David on February 24, 1990 proved crucial. Persuading the Soviets to accept what had been difficult even for some Western leaders to accept proved much more difficult. America’s strategy depended on Western solidarity and Soviet unwillingness, or inability, to take decisive action. Persuading a defeated Soviet Union to accept a major realignment of the European balance of power meant waiting for an opening. That occurred when Gorbachev simply could not provide an acceptable alternative to the position taken by the United States. Not having an acceptable solution of his own, facing increasing domestic problems, and desperately needing foreign financial assistance, Gorbachev broke with hard-liners and agreed on June 1, 1990, at the Washington Summit, to allow, in principle, a unified Germany to remain in NATO. Bush persuaded Gorbachev to be more flexible about German membership in NATO; in return, Gorbachev reached a trade agreement with the United States to help his
struggling domestic economy. Bush set out to eliminate Gorbachev’s remaining reservations by pushing through a plan for a new NATO structure, which would change NATO’s traditional role to that of a political alliance. On July 14, 1990, during a meeting between Kohl and Gorbachev, Gorbachev agreed to German reunification within NATO without conditions or reservations in exchange for massive German economic assistance. The Washington Summit allowed Gorbachev to accept the final terms without, at least in his mind, appearing to concede to Western ultimatums. The reunification of Germany within NATO, in conjunction with the withdrawal of Soviet troops in Eastern Europe, marked the end of the Cold War.

The new relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union was evident during the Persian Gulf War when the Bush administration was able to garner Soviet support for UN resolutions against Iraq. Soviet support of coalition efforts against a former Soviet client state could not have taken place during the Cold War. As former U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union Jack Matlock suggests, Soviet support of the United States during the Gulf War proved the Cold War rivalry had ended.13 Members of the press now accused him of being too loyal to Gorbachev. This relationship was jeopardized in August 1991, as a coup attempt sought to remove Gorbachev from power. The Bush administration had always been worried about hardliners in Moscow. In fact, one of the reasons that the Bush administration had been slow in embracing Gorbachev was an uncertainty as to whether he would stay in power. Thanks to determined maneuverings of Boris Yeltsin and George Bush, the coup collapsed. Yeltsin’s actions made him a force to be reckoned with, and
Gorbachev faced a very difficult political situation. Central Soviet authority declined at an accelerated rate and the Communist Party was discredited. This did not go unnoticed by Bush, who switched his support to Yeltsin. The failed coup accelerated the rise of Yeltsin and the republics and the demise of Gorbachev and the Soviet Union. Gorbachev urged a union of sovereign states, a confederative state that would carry out the functions delegated to it by the various republics. Yeltsin wanted a commonwealth of fully independent states. The decision was reached during a secret meeting held by Yeltsin and other republic leaders in the first days of December 1991. Only after the leaders reached full agreement and called Bush to ask for his support did Yeltsin call Gorbachev to inform him on what had been decided. A furious Gorbachev relinquished his duties as president and the USSR came to an end. During the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a long process that began with the August coup and ended with Gorbachev's resignation on Christmas day, Bush played a pivotal role in the peaceful transition of power between Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

President Bush was a cautious pragmatist who preferred gradual change to reckless impatience that might lead to disorder. The result was a foreign policy based on personal diplomacy and incremental change. This brought criticism from those who favored bold action. Bush's preference for quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomatic maneuvering made for slow newsdays but good leadership. An unflattering media image, however, affected Bush's public approval ratings, which steadily declined following the end of the Persian Gulf War in early 1991. This, combined with a flawed domestic agenda, led to his defeat in 1992. No one leader can be credited with ending

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13 Jack F. Matlock, Jr., Speech at a luncheon for the Society for Historians of
the Cold War. Neither Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, George Bush, or any other single leader had that much impact. But each influenced when and how that end would occur with both their foreign policy successes and mistakes. Ultimately, the Soviet Union could not afford to maintain the high level of defense spending that was bankrupting the country. In order to achieve domestic economic reforms, the rationale for the Red Army had to be broken; a “gilded age” of Soviet power ended. This forced Gorbachev to loosen his grip on Eastern Europe, unleashing forces that he could not control. Bush, to his credit, skillfully managed the end of the Cold War. It was during Bush’s administration that the Cold War ended and Germany was reunited. The United States led the alliance that liberated Kuwait from Iraqi control; and the Soviet Union collapsed and the former Soviet Bloc countries began the transition to democracy and market economies. Bush led a transition: a transition from the Cold War to a post-Cold War world. Bush’s diplomatic strengths proved as great as his media skills and domestic agenda were weak. This dissertation explains how the Bush administration managed the end of the Cold War, helping it end not with a bang, but a peaceful whimper.

January 21, 1985, was an extremely cold day in Washington, D.C. So cold, in fact, that the inaugural parade was cancelled; President Ronald Reagan’s inaugural address was held in the Rotunda of the Capitol rather than on the West Portico of the Capitol.\(^1\) The cold weather outside, however, did not stop the seventy-four-year-old Reagan from using rhetorical skills honed in nearly forty years of public speaking. He began with a silent prayer, combining politics with religion. His ability to infuse secular political events with religious ritual gave his speeches a sacred quality. No president since Franklin D. Roosevelt had used such spiritually laden rhetoric so effectively. Reagan combined this rhetoric with an emphasis on heroes such as George Washington, value-centered appeals to freedom and progress, and repentance and reformation of the existing order with a prophecy of a God-given destiny for the United States. This mix entailed heavy use of anecdotes and examples. Reagan was a master storyteller; his audiences were treated to simple stories that had at their center a moral, political, or economic lesson.\(^2\)

Reagan began his public speaking career in the late 1940s, giving speeches in opposition to communism while co-chair of the Motion Picture Industry Council and a board member of the Screen Actors Guild. His early political career was based on...
strong anticommunist rhetoric. He joined the Republican Party to be in the company of other right-wing spokesmen, such as Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy. The rhetoric of Reagan's early career permeated his political terminology, culminating in his 1987 reference to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." Reagan's ability as president to communicate with the American public did not suddenly materialize, nor was it a natural ability that Reagan possessed from the beginning. The skills he used as an orator, as well as the themes that he would stress as president, slowly developed over a long career. At the heart of this process was Reagan's commitment to oratorical perfection. Reagan's orations over four decades were extremely repetitive. He loved stump speeches, given over and over but with slight variation. A former actor, Reagan knew that the more he practiced his lines the better he would be at delivering them. Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater said that Reagan memorized his briefings so that he could recite them almost verbatim. He knew how to follow scripts. He was not averse to using someone else's words. As president he relied on a staff of skillful speechwriters. On taking office, President Reagan gave a packet of old speeches to his new speechwriters, instructing them to imitate his style and substance. Reagan's style was so predictable that speechwriters, however many came and went, could deliver the same product. To Reagan, careful planning and practice were the keys to gaining the

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3 Ibid, 119.
greatest audience approval. This does not mean that Reagan was vulnerable in unrehearsed question-and-answer sessions such as press conferences. He had collected more than forty years worth of stories, anecdotes, briefings, and stump speeches that he could apply to current situations. Reagan also proved adept at anticipating situations where a well-rehearsed line could have a big impact. In his 1980 debate with Jimmy Carter, Reagan is remembered for what appeared to be a spur-of-the-moment put-down of Carter: “There you go again.”7 The “impromptu” line, however, had been carefully rehearsed to be used in situations when Carter attempted to place emphasis on potentially dangerous charges against Reagan.8 He would use that same line in a 1984 debate with Walter Mondale.9 Reagan had trouble remembering people’s names and even the previous day’s office schedule; he could, however, remember the scripts that he had worked so hard to perfect.10

Reagan enjoyed an impressive mastery of the television medium. According to Peter Hannaford, Reagan’s chief speechwriter, 1974–80, “Ronald Reagan knew that television is the most personal of the media. He knew that when he looked into the camera, he was really looking at one person, or one family, seated before a set in the living room. What he would have with them was a quiet conversation, just as if he was

7 1980 Presidential Debate, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, 28 October 1980, Cleveland, video footage provided by C-SPAN.
9 1984 Presidential Debate, Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale, 7 October 1984, Louisville, video footage provided by C-SPAN.
10 Fitzwater, Call the Briefing!, 120.
Reagan himself recalls how he learned how to communicate with people while working as a sports announcer:

I had a group of friends in Des Moines and we all happened to go to the same barber. My friends would sometimes sneak away from their offices or other jobs when I was broadcasting a game and they'd get together at the barbershop to listen to it; after a while, I began to picture these friends down at the shop when I was on the air and, knowing they were there, I'd try to imagine how my words sounded to them and how they were reacting, and I'd adjust accordingly and spoke as if I was speaking personally to them. There was a specific audience out there I could see in my mind, and I sort of aimed my words at them. After I did that, something funny happened: I started getting mail from people all over the Midwest who told me I sounded as if I was talking directly and personally to them. Over the years I've always remembered that, and when I'm speaking to a crowd—or on television—I try to remember that audiences are made up of individuals and I try to speak as if I am talking to a group of friends... not to millions, but to a handful of people in a living room... or a barbershop.12

This ability to make each audience member feel that he was talking directly to them served Reagan well during the course of his political career. In the end, Reagan was not given the title Great Communicator for his clear speaking or writing. The word communication is derived from the Latin communicate, which can mean “to share” and “to unite, to join together.” Reagan’s achievement in communication came from his view of it as “a unifying process of commitment to the values and beliefs presented by the communicator.”13 By that technical definition, Reagan’s mastery of communication was unparalleled.

Reagan used all of his polished communication skills during his 1985 inaugural address. He spoke to the American public “as a benign and genial uncle”14

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13 Erickson, Reagan Speaks, 1.
whose honest advice would reunite America with its God-given role as a chosen land. He reached them through the common bond of emotion that transcended the differences found in America. Near the end of his speech, he turned to the issue of safety and security for the United States. He prefaced his remarks with an affirmation of the ancient prayer for peace on Earth. Reminiscent of his earlier attacks on communism, he blamed the Soviet Union for conducting “the greatest military buildup in the history of man.” Alluding to ongoing negotiations, he made a statement that would never have been found in his first inaugural address. Rejecting the principle of mutual assured destruction (MAD), Reagan proclaimed that the United States was committed to “the total elimination one day of nuclear weapons from the face of the earth.” He expressed his commitment to creating for the American public a security shield that would destroy nuclear missiles before they reached their target and promised to work with the Soviets to eliminate the threat of nuclear destruction. 

This statement had its origins in a speech given almost exactly one year prior in the East Room of the White House on United States-Soviet Relations. In that speech of January 16, 1984, Reagan reversed his foreign policy toward the Soviet Union, marking an important turning point in the Cold War. Reagan declared his support of a zero option for all nuclear arms and declared that his dream was to see the “day when nuclear weapons will be banished from the face of the earth.” This would lead to the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START). He also called for the mutual military withdrawal from the third world and promised to establish a better working

relationship with the Soviet Union, marked by greater cooperation and understanding and built on deeds rather than words. Reagan reminded his audience that the Soviet Union also wanted to avoid war and reduce the level of arms and that, while the two countries had differences, they could find common ground. He ended with a story:

Well, those differences are differences in governmental structure and philosophy. The common interests have to do with the things of everyday life for people everywhere. Just suppose with me for a moment that an Ivan and an Anya could find themselves, oh, say, in a waiting room, or sharing a shelter from the rain or a storm with a Jim and Sally, and there was no language barrier to keep them from getting acquainted. Would they then debate the differences between their respective governments? Or would they find themselves comparing notes about their children and what each other did for a living? Before they parted company, they would probably have touched on ambitions and hobbies and what they wanted for their children and problems of making ends meet. And as they went their separate ways, maybe Anya would be saying to Ivan, ‘Wasn’t she nice? She also teaches music.’ Or Jim would be telling Sally what Ivan did or didn’t like about his boss. They might even have decided they were all going to get together for dinner some evening soon. Above all, they would have proven that people don’t make wars. People want to raise their children in a world without fear and without war. They want to have some of the good things over and above the bare subsistence that make life worth living. They want to work at some craft, trade, or profession that gives them satisfaction and a sense of worth. Their common interests cross all borders.

In one of the most remarkable speeches ever given by a U.S. president during the Cold War, Reagan demonstrated that, to him, the most potent weapons of all were a well-told story and faith in the inherent goodness of mankind. The moral of the story was the same as the lessons taught in all of his stories: Good people would do the right thing. As Marlin Fitzwater recalls in his memoir, this was the core of Reagan’s political principles. In this speech, Reagan was telling the world that the President of

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17 Public Papers of the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan 1981–88, 44.
18 Fitzwater, Call the Briefing!, 117.
the United States believed that Americans and Soviets alike were, at their core, good people. It was a tangible gesture in improving U.S.-Soviet relations.

Many historians credit Mikhail Gorbachev with changing U.S.-Soviet relations. Reagan's speech, however, came fifteen months before Gorbachev took office and more than two years before glasnost and perestroika. By 1985, the Reagan goal of negotiating from a position of strength had been achieved. The Soviets had returned to the negotiating table under an altered arms control debate that shifted the focus away from arms limitation talks and toward a new American reliance on strategic defense.19 Many critics of Reagan charged him with election-year propaganda. The Democrats charged that Reagan had been drawn back to the center in an effort to increase his chances for reelection. Reagan had, according to his critics, abandoned his ideology in favor of pragmatism. The fact that he made his speech the day before a scheduled Democratic primary debate only served to fuel speculation. Considering that up to that point the Reagan administration had used a vehement anticommmunist rhetoric, it is easy to see why his sudden change in positions would be questioned. In order to understand this sudden change, one must look at how these types of decisions were made in the Reagan administration. Lou Cannon has explained that Reagan practiced "a delegative style of decision-making."20 Reagan was a master communicator to the American public; however, he rarely supplied his subordinates with clearly defined tasks. This would place increased importance on the fact that both Secretary of State George Shultz and National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane


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favored a more conciliatory policy approach to the Soviet Union. This suggests that Schultz and McFarlane were responsible for the decision to change U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union. That explanation, however, does not explain the timing for the change. Nor does it take into account that although Reagan did practice a somewhat “hands-off” presidency, he had the ability to focus on an issue that especially interested him and lead policy making on the issue with little regard to his advisors. The threat of nuclear war was just such an issue. The foundation of the U.S.-Soviet policies concerning arms control had been the theory of mutual assured destruction (MAD) in which safety was achieved as long as each side possessed enough power to destroy the other. Reagan felt that such a doctrine was morally reprehensible because of the unthinkable number of people that would be annihilated in full-scale nuclear war. Reagan described the MAD policy as “having two westerners standing in a saloon aiming their guns at each other’s head—permanently.”

Early in his administration, Reagan did not feel that nuclear war was imminent. To him, the Cold War was first and foremost a war of words. Reagan’s political career had been based on strident rhetoric; he felt the accusations exchanged between the Kremlin and the White House were simple political posturing. At some point near the end of his first term in office, however, Reagan became obsessed with the idea that a nuclear war would soon erupt if a change was not made in U.S.-Soviet policy. The cause for Reagan’s change of perspective included an attack by a Soviet jet fighter on

22 A clear example of this is Reagan’s total support for SDI even when the vast majority of his advisors and experts warned him that it was impossible.
a Korean airliner that was flying from Alaska to Seoul with 269 people on board, including 61 Americans. The plane had accidentally drifted 360 miles off course and had twice flown over Soviet airspace. The Soviet Air Defense Command sent a Sukhoi-15 fighter to intercept the plane. Claiming that he did not recognize the Boeing 747 as a commercial jetliner, the Soviet Pilot locked his radar on the plane. After receiving the orders to shoot, he fired two missiles at the airliner just as it was exiting Soviet airspace and about to reenter international airspace. The missiles struck the tail and tore off half of the left wing, forcing the plane to crash into the ocean at a speed of several hundred miles an hour. The downing of KAL Flight 007 in the fall of 1983 occurred thanks to a series of mistakes by the Soviets and a crackdown by Soviet leader Yuri Andropov, who had instituted a tough new “Law on the State Border.” The law was meant to address sloppy military discipline, but had the effect of intimidating Soviet military officers who carried out the law’s requirements like “unthinking robots.” The lack of communication between the Kremlin and the White House following the incident worsened the situation. Initially, the Soviets denied that they had shot down the plane. When it became obvious that the plane had been shot down, the Soviets claimed that the pilot of the airliner had refused a demand to land at the nearest airfield. The Soviets finally admitted that they had shot down the airliner; however, they claimed that it was on a “deliberate, thoroughly planned intelligence

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23 Reagan, An American Life, 547.
24 For a complete explanation of Reagan’s change in thinking see The Reagan Reversal by Beth A. Fischer.
operation," directed from the United States and Japan. It would not be until the collapse of the Soviet Union that the full story would be known. The following year the hotline between the two capitols would be upgraded radically through the use of a facsimile machine in an effort to avoid the confusion that had surrounded the tragic incident. A little over a month after the KAL Flight 007 downing, the president attended a private screening of an ABC television movie "The Day After," which showed the horrors of nuclear holocaust. Reagan's diary entry for that day details his reaction:

In the morning at Camp D. I ran the tape of the movie ABC is running Nov. 20. It's called "The Day After" in which Lawrence, Kansas, is wiped out in a nuclear war with Russia. It is powerfully done, all $7 million worth. It's very effective and left me greatly depressed. So far they haven't sold any of the 25 ads scheduled and I can see why... My own reaction: we have to do all we can to have a deterrent and to see there is never a nuclear war.

Reagan had always been affected most by visual images, stories, and emotions. His foreign policy advisors even abandoned the usual briefing books in favor of short films. The ABC movie brought home the "realities" of a nuclear war to Reagan in a way that briefing books could never have done. Less than a month after viewing "The Day After," Reagan attended his first Pentagon briefing on nuclear war. Having refused to attend such meetings during the first two years of his presidency, Reagan participated in what he would later describe as "a most sobering experience." The Pentagon report detailed a sequence of events that could lead to complete world annihilation. The sequence of events described in the report bore striking similarities to the ABC movie. What concerned Reagan even more was the fact that many people

26 Powell with Persico, My American Journey, 283.
27 Reagan, An American Life, 585.
in that meeting still described nuclear war as “winnable.” Reagan recalled thinking these men were crazy and worried that Soviet generals might also be thinking in terms of winning a nuclear war. \(^{29}\) The final event in that sobering sequence of events occurred in early November during a large-scale NATO military exercise named Able Archer 83, which sought to test nuclear release mechanisms. The Soviets were suspicious of the exercise and worried that the NATO war games were really camouflaging preparation for an actual attack on the Soviet Union. The KGB had become convinced by the Reagan rhetoric that a nuclear first strike had become a serious possibility and instituted a system of Surprise Nuclear Missile Attack alerts in 1981. \(^{30}\) Now this system sprang into effect in an effort to counter Abel Archer 83. Fearing an impending nuclear attack, the Soviets discussed launching a preemptive nuclear attack. As perhaps the most dangerous Cold War moment since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, Able Archer 83 was viewed by the Reagan administration as a nuclear “near-miss.” As Robert McFarlane would later recall, the “war scare” had a “big influence” on Reagan’s subsequent approach to the Soviet Union. \(^{31}\)

The events of 1983 had convinced Reagan that nuclear war was a real possibility. The biblical prophecy of Armageddon permeated Reagan’s thoughts in 1983–84. In response to this threat, Reagan recalled making a conscious decision to “switch to a more hands-on approach” concerning arms reduction. From then on, Reagan consulted only with George Bush, George Shultz, Caspar Weinberger, and

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\(^{28}\) Ibid., 585.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 586.


Robert McFarlane to develop a plan for U.S.-Soviet policy. Reagan became committed to the doctrine of strategic defense and the actual reduction of nuclear arsenals. His proposal for a space-based strategic defense shield that would protect the United States from a nuclear attack was called SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative). Critics quickly labeled it “Star Wars” and charged that it was unrealistic. Reagan, however, was determined to bequeath to future generations of Americans a protective shield that would allow them to live without fear of nuclear destruction. As Marlin Fitzwater recalls, Reagan’s faith in SDI was so great that “Reagan’s staff twice intercepted a Reagan written speech insert about the prospect of an alien force threatening the earth from space, thereby bringing all the countries of the world together in a Steven Spielberg defense of mankind.” Reagan had not given much thought to the technical specifics of SDI when he introduced it. Unlike Jimmy Carter, who was a very intelligent nuclear engineer, Reagan was not prone to deep thinking in the field of nuclear strategy. Consequently, he tended to see the announcement of his SDI proposal as an end in itself. Reagan preferred to say, in short: the problem is nuclear war; the solution is SDI: “let’s do it.” This approach, as one study of SDI concludes, “appealed to Reagan’s image of Uncle Sam as an enterprising, self-sufficient, fix-it man with more trust in his own common sense than in what the

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33 Fitzwater, *Call the Briefing!*, 245.
know-it-alls might say. While critics of the program relied on the fact that SDI was probably not feasible and would cost more than most taxpayers would be willing to pay, Reagan relied on his political instincts. To Reagan, the fact that the idea was easy to understand was more important than whether or not the physics and engineering would be feasible. SDI could never be fully tested unless there was nuclear war. Even then the system would have to be 100 percent effective or tens of millions of Americans would die.

The Soviets were terrified of SDI because they assumed that a U.S. president would not place complete faith in a program unless he was certain that it could be achieved. Indeed, three-fourths of the Soviet propaganda budget in 1984, 1985, and 1986 was directed solely against SDI. What frustrated Soviet leaders even more was the fact that Reagan refused to abolish SDI in exchange for Soviet concessions of any kind. As George Schultz recalls, “Whenever we got together with the Soviets in the Reagan-Gorbachev meetings, SDI was always on Gorbachev’s mind. He seemed almost ready to concede anything if he could only manage to deep-six that program.”

As Marlin Fitzwater recalls, another consideration was the sheer economic strength that would be needed for a Soviet response to SDI:

In all the summit meetings that I was in with Reagan and Gorbachev, everyone of them ended in the Soviet Union’s plea toward getting us to drop SDI. That was the objective, and the reason was because they always thought it was an offensive system. President Reagan presented it as a defensive shield, but they always thought we were going to get up in space, build some platform, and then launch a nuclear attack on Russia. And their problem was that they felt they couldn’t afford to match it. And so, they knew... that’s when they started

37 Mandelbaum and Talbott, Reagan and Gorbachev, 130.
getting serious about arms reduction. Their view was, we don’t have the money to ever build a space-based system; let’s get out of the arms race. So they started reducing nuclear weapons.40

This allowed Reagan to have substantial leverage during their arms limitation talks and allowed him to change the very nature of these talks. In the past, arms control talks had focused on limiting the growth of nuclear arsenals. The result had been the SALT I and the SALT II accords. Reagan, however, wanted to do more than limit the growth of nuclear arsenals. He wanted to reduce those arsenals, the final goal being the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Gorbachev, however, demanded that SDI be abandoned before any arms agreement could be reached. Reagan’s refusal to make concessions on SDI caused him to turn down arms control proposals at the Reykjavik summit in October 1986.41 Critics, such as Brent Scowcroft, thought Reagan’s complete dedication to SDI negated it as a leverage tool:

But my sense is that [SDI] tended rather than to use as leverage to get other things [the United States] wanted, it tended to stymie the negotiations because we would never put SDI on the table. So the Russians tended to drag their feet because of that.42

But Reagan never altered his complete faith and commitment to SDI.

Early in his administration, Reagan instituted policies that critics claimed had “forced the Soviets into a corner from which they might yet lash out in some unpredictable way.”43 In 1984, Reagan abandoned his confrontational rhetoric, instituting an extreme modification of U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union. He had not revised his assessment of communism, which he still felt was a dangerous system

40 Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.
42 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
of government. He did soften his image of the Kremlin, what can be interpreted as the beginning of the end of the Cold War. By the time he left the White House, Reagan had the highest approval rating of any departing president since World War II. It would be up to his successor to bring a final end to the Cold War. Lacking the rhetorical skills of his predecessor, George Bush would have to emerge from the shadow of Reagan and rely on his own strengths to finish the job that Reagan had begun. As Bush would quickly find out, Reagan would be a tough act to follow.

A New Administration

On January 20, 1989, George Bush gave his bicentennial inaugural address at the West Front of the Capitol. Bush began his address the same way he had conducted his entire vice presidency—by deferring to Reagan: “There is a man here who has earned a lasting place in our hearts and in our history. President Reagan, on behalf of our nation, I thank you for the wonderful things that you have done for America.” With a conviction greater than perhaps any vice president in history, George Bush believed that his primary role was to be absolutely loyal to the president. Reagan rewarded this loyalty by including Bush in the policy-making process. Reagan knew that he could trust Bush completely without fear of leaks to the press or public disagreements over policy. As a result, Bush was deeply involved in discussions concerning the Soviet Union during the Reagan presidency. He also was used by Reagan to meet with new Soviet leaders and provide first impressions. When Soviet

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leader Leonid I. Brezhnev died in November of 1982, Reagan sent Bush as head of an American delegation to the funeral in Moscow.\textsuperscript{46} Bush used his meeting with the new Soviet leader Yuri Andropov to call for change in U.S.-Soviet relations, to seek “a world of greater harmony, not only between the two great superpowers, but for all nations.” He stressed that his visit signified “the desire of the United States to continue to work for positive relations between our two countries.”\textsuperscript{47} Improved relations did not occur under the leadership of Yuri Andropov. In fact, they steadily declined. Less than two years later, Bush again traveled to Moscow to attend the funeral of a Soviet leader, this time Andropov’s. White House officials hoped that Bush’s trip could be used to signal Reagan’s desire for better relations with the Soviet Union and to propose a meeting between Reagan and the new leader. Preparations for the trip were made in Washington during meetings led by Bush. Reagan was on vacation at a mountaintop ranch, enjoying daily rides on horseback. He was kept abreast of the situation by periodic calls from Bush.\textsuperscript{48} This shows that Reagan was comfortable leaving crucial decisions in the hands of his vice president. Following Andropov’s funeral, Bush had a 30-minute talk with the new Soviet leader, Konstantin Chernenko.\textsuperscript{49} In an official statement following the meeting, Bush stressed Reagan’s “determination to move forward in all areas of our relationship with the Soviets, and

our readiness for concrete, productive discussions in every one of them.” Bush insisted on “deeds and not just words” from the Soviets.50 In March of 1985, Bush represented the president at Chernenko’s funeral, this time carrying an invitation to the new leader Mikhail Gorbachev for a summit conference with Reagan. In all, Bush attended the funerals of three Soviet leaders during the Reagan presidency. Each time Bush was given the responsibility of being the first representative of the United States to meet with the new leader, affirming U.S.-policy goals, and reporting his first impressions of the new leader back to Reagan. Bush had taken an unusually prominent role for a vice president in forging policies toward the Soviet Union and in taking the lead in meeting with Soviet leaders. Reagan, however, had complete trust in Bush that was no doubt solidified by the unquestioning loyalty demonstrated by the vice president.

The “Wimp” Factor

In his inaugural address, Bush shared his view of the changes that were happening in the world and the opportunities that he would face during his presidency:

“I come before you and assume the presidency at a moment rich with promise…. For a new breeze is blowing, and a world refreshed by freedom seems reborn…. There is new ground to be broken and new action to be taken.”51 The vast majority of political observers would agree with the new president that major changes would occur in the world during the Bush administration. Many of those observers, however, argued that Bush was not the man for the job. One of the main drawbacks of Bush’s quiet loyalty

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to Reagan was that it did not allow him to establish a strong image that was distinct
and independent of Reagan. Consequently, Bush’s bid for the presidency in 1988 was
hampered by his poor image in the media. According to Marlin Fitzwater:

My press strategy was to introduce the vice president to as many reporters as
possible during this period so that by 1988 he would know the press corps.
During the next two years, he gave nearly seventy-five interviews.
Unfortunately, almost every one of them was bad. The reporters begged him to
criticize President Reagan or tell them the inside story of the decision-making
process... but he would never oblige. The stories always came out that Bush
was loyal to a fault.52

The low point came in 1987 just prior to Bush’s announcement as an official
candidate. Newsweek featured a profile of Bush and pictured him on the cover,
piloting his racing boat with the headline “George Bush: Fighting the ‘Wimp Factor’.”
Even many Republicans conceded that the story by Margaret Garrard Warner was an
in-depth discussion of character, which was a legitimate campaign issue. In the article,
Warner explained that Bush suffered from “a potentially crippling handicap—a
perception that he isn’t strong enough or tough enough for the challenges of the Oval
Office. That he is, in a single mean word, a wimp.”53 The article, however, did not
really hurt Bush. The real damage came from the picture of Bush on the cover and the
cover line, which prompted many voters to ask themselves, “Is George Bush a wimp
or isn’t he a wimp?” As Lee Atwater of the Bush campaign explained: “It was not the
story but, guess what, not enough people read Newsweek every week to make any
difference in terms of national consciousness. But guess what else? I went jogging this

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51 George Bush, Public Papers of the President of the United States: George Bush,
52 Fitzwater, Call the Briefing!, 75.
53 Margaret Garrard Warner, “Bush Battles the ‘Wimp Factor’,” Newsweek, 19
October 1987, 29.
morning and I saw *Newsweek* on four newsstands. Guess what I saw? The cover.54 The issue quickly entered the public arena as the cover made its rounds on the weekly television news talk shows, hosts showing viewers the cover, then debating whether or not Bush was a wimp. The rest of the media soon chimed in; George Will claimed that Bush was Reagan’s lap dog; cartoonist Gary Trudeau suggested that Bush’s manhood was in a blind trust.55 It might seem odd that a former Navy pilot, who received the Distinguished Flying Cross during World War II, former director of the CIA, and self-made millionaire Texas Oilman, could be seen as a wimp when compared to a former actor and radio broadcaster, who never fought in battle.56 The real source of the wimp label was Bush’s poor media skills. As Bush’s media consultant Roger Ailes commented: “If everyone in America could just sit down with the guy in his living room for two minutes, there would be no contest: he would win by a landslide.”57 If Reagan could play the part of John Wayne, Ailes was confident that Bush could fill the role of Gary Cooper—strong, silent, slow to anger, and tough in a fight.58 Unfortunately for Bush, he was being compared to one of the most skillful communicators in history and the strong, silent type did not play well with the media. The media made the “wimp” issue a concern for voters by the sheer amount of attention it received on television and in the press. The public would compare the

58 Ibid.
would-be president's strength to Reagan through the joint television appearances that they made during the Reagan presidency. Reagan was seen as the bold leader; Bush dutifully in the background. Even Bush's children admitted that it did not produce a favorable comparison. Jeb Bush explained that he had "made money betting people that my dad is taller than Ronald Reagan." The simple reality was that "television, the medium that makes Ronald Reagan larger than life, diminishes George Bush. He does not project self-confidence, wit or warmth to television viewers. He comes across instead to many of them as stiff or silly." During his term as vice president, Bush refused to disagree publicly with President Reagan. Unfortunately for him, it was probably the one thing that would have established him as his own man and established for him a separate political identity. But Bush had not publicly disagreed with Reagan since the two men battled for the Republican presidential nomination in 1980.

The Nashua Debate

One of Bush's problems with the media was that he really did not enjoy campaigning. He viewed it merely as a necessity to get to the more important business of governing. He did not enjoy having to play to the crowd, and it showed. The fact that the majority of his public service had been by appointment had allowed Bush to advance through the ranks without having to learn the painful (at least for modest types) art of self-promotion. As his friend Brent Scowcroft explains:

He was much more decisive in moving out in private than he appeared in his public persona. I think he was deeply affected by his mother who used to tell

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59 Warner, "Bush Battles the 'Wimp Factor'," Newsweek, 28.
60 Ibid., 30.
him all the time, ‘George, don’t brag.’ And so I think he tended in public to underplay things.  

Bush was well thought of by his peers, and that was what mattered most to Bush. The vast differences between Reagan and Bush as far as campaigners can be seen in their 1980 fight for the Republican nomination. Bush and Reagan quickly emerged as the two favorites in a crowded Republican field. Reagan had refused to participate in the first debate, held in Iowa. Consequently, many of the voters in Iowa became angry with Reagan and handed Bush a solid victory in the Iowa caucus, which established Bush as the frontrunner in a tight two-man race. Heading into the New Hampshire primaries, Reagan was determined not to make the same mistake. He agreed to debate the other candidates on February 21, 1980, in Manchester, New Hampshire. He appeared with Representatives Philip Crane and John Anderson, both of Illinois, Texas governor John Connally, Senator Howard Baker, Jr. of Tennessee, Senator Bob Dole of Kansas, and George Bush. The debate was more of a forum discussion; partisan attacks were not allowed. In other words, it was the kind of political event that only the most serious political junky would remember. No candidate made any memorable statements—or blunders. Bush seemed especially focused on not making any statements that might hurt his frontrunner position. Just prior to the debate Bush admitted: “I don’t think that it [the debate] is something that can be won. I think it is something that can be lost if someone makes a big mistake.” This reluctance to take chances was typical of Bush’s political background. Reagan, however, was just

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61 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
waiting to get George Bush alone. The Reagan campaign team had desperately wanted to have a head-to-head debate with Bush. The *Nashua Telegraph*, a newspaper in New Hampshire, agreed to host the debate; however, the Federal Election Commission had ruled that such a sponsorship that excluded all but two of the candidates would be an illegal corporate contribution. The newspaper, in turn, asked the two candidates to split the $3,500 cost of the debate. The Bush side declined to pay for their share because they argued it would push Bush over the legal spending limit for New Hampshire. The plans for the debate seemed to be at an end. Soon rumors began to spread that Bush preferred not to risk his front runner status. Reagan aides then agreed to cover the entire cost of the debate.64 Remembering the damage that Reagan had suffered when he refused to debate in Iowa, Bush agreed to the debate. The debate was scheduled to take place in the Nashua Senior High School gym on Saturday, February 22—just three days before the New Hampshire primary.

Controversy began the afternoon before the debate; Reagan suddenly changed his mind and decided that the debate should include all challengers. Since he was paying for the debate, he felt that it was his decision to make. He was neglecting the fact that he had agreed to pay for the debate in the first place to avoid just such an occurrence. The *Nashua Telegraph* could have legally paid for a debate that was open to all candidates. The situation soon became explosive. While 1,500 people waited in the gym forty minutes past the scheduled starting time, chanting “We Want Reagan”

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and "Bush, Bush," the real action was taking place in the corridors of the school. Reagan met with four of the excluded candidates, assuring them that he wanted the debate broadened to include them. Reagan’s national political director, Charles Black, was sent to meet with Bush’s campaign manager, James Baker, to request a meeting with Bush. Baker rejected the meeting and rejected the idea that the other candidates, who would come to be known as the Nashua Four, be allowed to debate. Baker replied that he “wanted to stick with the letter of the [arrangements originally made] by the Nashua Telegraph. It wasn’t our call—it was the Telegraph’s call.” In fact, Bush handlers had told the Nashua Telegraph that they were willing to open up the debate; however, the newspaper declined the suggestion. The debate finally began as Bush walked onto the stage smiling. An obviously angry Reagan stormed onto stage followed by the four jilted candidates who stood behind the seated Reagan, Bush, and moderator “like hapless losers in a game of musical chairs.” Bush sat stiffly in his chair “like a small boy who has been dropped off at the wrong birthday party.” The moderator, Nashua Telegraph executive editor Jon Breen, announced that the debate would proceed as originally scheduled: a two-man debate. When Reagan interrupted to explain why he wanted the debate to include the other four candidates, Breen ordered: “Will you please turn off Governor Reagan’s microphone.” Reagan grabbed his microphone and shouted back, “I’m paying for this microphone, 

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66 John Conally was campaigning in South Carolina and chose not to return to New Hampshire for the debate.
68 “We Were Sandbagged,” Time, 10 March 1980, 15.
Mr. Green.\textsuperscript{70} It did not matter that Reagan had gotten the moderator’s name wrong. The crowd went wild with applause. People in the audience began shouting things at the moderator such as “You Hitler!” and “Didn’t you ever hear of freedom of the press?”\textsuperscript{71} The exchange between Reagan and the moderator would be the only image that most Americans would have concerning the debate. The debate was not televised and, other than the few seconds of footage shown on the evening news, no other video footage exists. During the uproar, Bush stayed in his seat looking flustered and confused. The four excluded candidates walked off stage and the formal proceedings began. Reagan debated with an enthusiasm not seen in the previous dates, dominating the discussion with one-liners that placed Bush on the defensive.\textsuperscript{72} During the debate, the four excluded candidates were speaking to the press in the school’s band room, making it clear that they placed all of the responsibility for their exclusion on the shoulders of Bush. Dole summed up the mood of the four men when he stated that “George Bush torpedoed us tonight . . . as far as George Bush is concerned, he had better find himself another party.”\textsuperscript{73} All four men vowed to do everything in their power to assure that Bush would not be the nominee.

The Nashua debate proved to be the turning point in the 1980 campaign for the Republican nomination. Bush’s frontrunner status disintegrated; Reagan won the New

\textsuperscript{71} “We Were Sandbagged,” \textit{Time}, 10 March 1980, 15.
Hampshire primary with 50 percent of the vote; Bush finished second with 23 percent.\textsuperscript{74} Even Bush's pollster Robert Teeter admitted that many voters defected from Bush after the dramatic scene in Nashua and supported Reagan.\textsuperscript{75} A race that almost everyone thought would be close turned into a landslide victory during the last few days when Bush walked right into a political trap set by Reagan. James Baker explains the importance of the Nashua debate:

I think probably it was one turning point. I think it would have been very difficult for an unknown like George Bush, someone who was not known at all nationally—even after Iowa—to upset Ronald Reagan who had almost knocked off an incumbent president for the nomination in '76. He came very close to knocking off Gerry Ford. And people don't remember this but Governor Reagan started running for president in 1968. So I think that it would have been very tough for Bush to win in any event, but conceivable, and the Nashua debate was critical.\textsuperscript{76}

As one reporter accurately noted, the debate reinforced ''the very image problem Bush has fought to overcome: that he is just the sort of preppie, Yalie, Skull and Bones Society fellow his biography says he is. All of Bush's Republican opponents were hollering that he was arrogant, and that is the way it looked.\textsuperscript{77} James Baker conceded ''I don't think there's any doubt that what happened on Saturday night and after that hurt us severely.''\textsuperscript{78} Bush stayed in the fight until the convention; however, he had essentially lost after that night in Nashua. What Bush had not been able to fathom was that the instant media images created by the confrontation overshadowed the details

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., A6.
\textsuperscript{76} James A. Baker III, telephone interview by author, 22 May 2000.
such as who played fairly or who had the best positions on the issues. Reagan had swept aside the doubts of his vitality and age by becoming a larger than life presence on the stage. He fed off the emotion of the crowd and turned it to his advantage. Bush had solidified his public image as an up-tight eastern elitist fighting against a down-to-earth Reagan. As Baker recalls, it was pretty much over from that point:

Well it was [over] except that, you know, we won a lot of delegates and the reason he was put on the ticket . . . Reagan didn’t want to put him on the ticket because they’d had a fairly contentious primary, and Bush lasted through Michigan and Pennsylvania, well into May. He didn’t have to get out of the race until sometime in the first or second week in May, and he had a lot of delegates at the national convention. And, if you recall, in Detroit, Reagan tried to go to Ford and that never worked out. He really didn’t want to do Bush but then when that collapsed, when the Ford effort collapsed, there wasn’t anyplace to go except to Bush because he had delegates.79

In actuality, Baker had skillfully placed Bush in the right position to be vice president in hopes that the Ford nomination would fall apart:

What I’ll admit to, but George never will, is that the Veep thing was always the fallback. It was always in my mind. That’s why, at every opportunity, I had him cool his rhetoric about Reagan.80

Second place, however, had never been a goal for Bush and his remarkable determination and competitiveness was apparent during the 1980 fight for the Republican nomination. But, the weaknesses so obvious at Nashua were still there when he ran for president in 1988.

**Bush vs. Rather**

By the start of the 1988 campaign, Bush’s staff knew that they had to do something to counter his reserved image of deference to Reagan. Bush knew he was

78 Ibid.
an unconventional candidate for a post-Watergate electorate. His privileged background and impressive résumé set him apart from Reagan and Carter, whose populist aura and outsider status appealed to voters. Bush was without question identified with the establishment. Marlin Fitzwater explains the involvement of the Reagan administration:

We made a conscious effort to stay in the campaign. One of the reasons was that President Bush was not trying to create a separate identity. I mean, he was to a small degree, but his challenge was to show that his policies were the same as Ronald Reagan's because they had worked together for a long time; they were both conservatives. People wanted to know if he was going to be loyal to the Bush, I mean, Reagan's policies. And the press were always trying to drive a wedge between he and President Reagan.81

Perhaps equally as damaging were continued questions of Bush's role in the Iran-Contra Affair. Since the scandal became public in 1986, Bush had refused to provide a full accounting of his role in the clandestine operation. "I'm not a kiss-and-teller" Bush would repeatedly explain.82 The problem with the Iran-Contra Affair for Bush was that it attacked his experience in intelligence and diplomacy, his loyal service to Reagan, and his concern for ethics in government—his greatest assets. The issue came to a head when Vice President Bush agreed to a live interview with Dan Rather of CBS Evening News. Bush had insisted that the interview be live so that he would have a better chance at getting his points across. The interview on January 25, 1988, represents what media experts label a "defining event" as far as Bush's image was concerned.

81 Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.  
CBS had explained to Bush’s staff that the interview would be the first in a series of candidate profiles for the upcoming election. As it drew closer and closer to time for the interview, it became clear to the Bush staff that the interview would focus solely on Iran-Contra. After less than three minutes devoted to covering Ronald Reagan’s State of the Union address and less than a minute on the polls for the 1988 campaign, Dan Rather presented a five-minute report on Bush’s role in the Iran-Contra Affair. The report was very damaging to Bush and clearly demonstrated that Rather believed that he was far more involved than he had admitted to this point. The report showed a picture of Bush’s desk in a dark room with a lamp shining on two file folders marked “Arms Sales” and “Supplying the Contras.” Rather’s voice ticked off inconsistencies between Bush’s public statements and the official record:

[Bush] insists he was out of the loop, uniformed about the events and the risks of the Iran Initiatives. But the record shows, Mr. Bush attended more than fifteen meetings in the Oval Office at which the arms sales were discussed.

The report continued, comparing what Bush “says” and what “the record shows.”

Bush sat in his Senate office at the Capitol, watching the report on a television monitor (See figure 1.1). Bush’s anger grew as he watched the report. At one point he barked at the sound technician, “Iran-Contra Affair? . . . I didn’t know this was about the Iran-Contra Affair. Nobody told me . . . They aren’t going to talk to me about Iran-Contra, are they? If he talks to me about the Iran-Contra Affair, they’re going to see a

Figure 1.1. George Bush in his Senate office, watching the report on the television monitor while waiting for his live interview with Dan Rather. His ensuing confrontation with Rather would wipe away the “wimp” label in less than fifteen memorable television minutes. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
seven-minute walkout here." Rather, on the other hand, had spent the entire day preparing for the interview. The preparation included briefings by associates and Democratic Party activists, reading through material, and engaging in role playing activities to anticipate how Bush would respond. It was exactly the type of preparation that a candidate would engage in before a live debate. By the time the live interview began, the scene was set for fireworks to explode. Bush quickly accused CBS of misleading him concerning the subject of the interview:

Bush: You’ve impugned my integrity by suggesting, with one of your little boards here, that I didn’t tell the truth... you don’t accuse me of it, but you made that suggestion.... And so, I find this to be a rehash and a little bit—if you’ll excuse me—a misrepresentation on the part of CBS, who said you’re doing political profiles on all the candidates, and then you come up with something that has been exhaustively looked into.

Rather was quickly put on the defensive; the level of hostility steadily rose as Bush and Rather interrupted each other:

Bush: May I answer that?

Rather: That wasn’t a question. It was a statement.

Bush: It was a statement and I’ll answer it.

Rather: Let me ask the question, if I may, first.

Later in the interview:

Rather: I don’t want to be argumentative, Mr. Vice President.

Bush: You do, Dan.

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87 Ibid.
Bush sent Rather over the edge reminding Dan Rather how he angrily stalked off the news set in Miami when the start of his news program was delayed by network officials to accommodate the end of the U.S. Open tennis match. The walkout left the network on black for six or seven minutes. It was a major embarrassment to the network and showed Rather’s volatility and, some would argue, his immense ego.

Bush: This is not a great night, ’cause I want to talk about why I want to be president, why those 41 percent of the people are supporting me. And I don’t think it’s fair to judge a whole career, it’s not fair to judge my whole career by a rehash on Iran. How would you like it if I judged your career by those seven minutes when you walked off the set in New York? Would you like that? I have respect for you, but I don’t have respect for what you’re doing here tonight.88

It did not matter that he named the wrong city. Just as it did not matter in Nashua in 1980 when Reagan called the moderator by the wrong name. Bush had taken control of the situation. Rather sat frozen, his anger apparent to every viewer. He had lost control of the interview, and of his emotions. Rather returned to Iran-Contra, with a below-the-belt punch:

Rather: Mr. Vice President, you’ve made us hypocrites in the face of the world. How could you, how could you sign on to such a policy? And the question is what does this tell us about your record?89

Rather asked Bush if he would hold a news conference before the Iowa caucuses to answer questions about Iran-Contra. Bush declared that he had already held eighty-six news conferences on that subject since the story broke in 1986, Rather cut the vice president off:

Rather: I gather the answer is no. Thank you very much for being with us, Mr. Vice President.90

88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
Bush was furious. He slammed down his earphone exclaiming “The bastard didn’t lay a glove on me.” He then proceeded with an obscenity-laced tirade that was recorded by the CBS technicians.91 The “wimp” label was over.

Immediate reaction favored Bush. Thousands of viewers jammed the network’s lines expressing their opinion that Rather was a bully. His interviewing “style” was deemed rude and disrespectful to the office of vice president. The next day crowds were waving signs that read “We’d Rather Be for Bush” and “Dan Rather Is a Democrat.”92 Political cartoons pictured Bush as a gunslinger shooting a television set, or dressed as the fictional soldier Rambo and holding a machine gun labeled RAMBUSH. Fitzwater recalls the importance of the confrontation:

I think it helped him considerably.... The confrontation itself was helpful because simply it did kind of have a symbolic manhood effect if you will. Dan Rather came out of it looking really bad. He [Rather] was angry and felt he’d been humiliated and so forth. So I think on the whole it was very helpful for President Bush and the campaign. In the long term, it hurt his relationship with CBS, and that was always a difficult relationship from then on through his presidency. But the immediate effect was definitely good for President Bush and bad for Dan Rather.93

Rather, on the other hand, felt like a victim. He blamed others in the media for debating whether Bush had been badgered and treated with disrespect instead of following up on questions that he had felt Bush had once again ducked. He claimed that Bush had been practicing his explosions of outrage in the days leading up to the interview. As Rather recalls in his memoir:

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93 Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.
The indignation of Bush was as sincere as that of Captain Louis Renault, when he orders the closing of Rick’s Café in Casablanca: “I am shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on here,” the captain protests, as he slips into his pockets the winnings handed him by a waiter.94 He was especially upset with Bush’s charge that he had been ambushed. Going into the interview, Rather had one lone question that he wanted Bush to answer:

Why did we send over two thousand of our best missiles to the Ayatollah, after 241 of our best servicemen had been blown up on his orders?95 Rather had a highly placed secret source that he trusted telling him that Bush had eagerly played a major role in Iran-Contra. Bush had publicly denied it. Rather hoped to catch him in a lie. But, Rather had made no secret of his goal. The promos run by CBS during the week leading up to the interview clearly stated that the interview would cover questions concerning the Iran-Contra Affair. Rather himself had introduced the interview as “a live interview with Mr. Bush on arms to Iran and money to the Contras.”96 In addition to the charges of ambush, Rather was upset because he felt that the jab on the Miami episode was below the belt. When urged by the Evening News press representative to apologize, Rather angrily responded, “Wait a minute, I haven’t done anything to apologize for, and I’m not apologizing.”97 In fact, the only person in the CBS newsroom that felt Rather had done a great job was Tom Donilon, the paid CBS News consultant from the Democratic party who tried to console Rather. Even Rather himself was “acutely aware that it [the interview] had

95 Ibid., 101.
96 Ibid., 101.
97 Ibid., 114.
ended abruptly; it was like a door slamming in someone’s face.”98 But, that was the only mistake Rather was willing to admit. As for an apology, that was out of the question. Whether Rather apologized or not, whether the Bush campaign had staged Bush’s response or not, the “wimp” label had been wiped away in less than fifteen memorable television minutes.

The disintegration of his “wimp” label carried a heavy price as the Iran-Contra Affair came back into center stage. After the initial post-interview excitement, articles began to appear with titles such as “Bush Is Not A Wimp. Is He Qualified To Be President?”99 Questions continued to build throughout the primaries. Lee Atwater, Roger Ailes, and George Sununu urged the vice president to go on the offensive in order to deflect attention away from his own faults. Normally, the candidate preferred to leave the negative campaigning to his advertising and surrogates. The Bush campaign, however, was low on funds and would not be able to wage an advertising assault until the fall. They needed to create stories for the news media to cover. Also, Bush’s handlers wanted to strengthen his image by demonstrating to the public that he was a fighter. All of these problems could be resolved by attacking his opponents.

Bush had fought Dan Rather and won. Now it was time to fight for the presidency. Bush had always been uneasy about negative campaigning and was reluctant to give in to his advisors. “I don’t like that stuff,” he once told Atwater, “and I don’t want to hear any more of it.”100 Eventually though, Bush could no longer ignore the polling data and reluctantly agreed. Ironically, he would find help from the left when

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98 Ibid., 111.
Democratic presidential-hopeful Al Gore attacked Dukakis on Massachusetts’ record of permitting “weekend passes” for convicted first-degree murderers who were serving life sentences without possibility of parole. Bush’s staff seized on this story and used the case of one of the convicts, Willie Horton, to destroy Dukakis’ double-digit lead. From that point onward, the Bush campaign became a search-and-destroy mission, emphasizing Dukakis’ support of high taxes and increased spending, lack of support for defense, support for abortion, attempting to “disarm the state” through gun control, and attempting to veto the Pledge of Allegiance. In other words, Dukakis was the most liberal and thus the most un-American candidate in America. Rather than promoting reasons why voters should cast their ballots for their guy, the Bush campaign team was spewing out reasons why the public should vote against the other guy. Bush’s staff hoped that they could elevate their candidate by destroying the other in a political zero-sum game of epic proportions.

Of course, George Herbert Walker Bush did win the 1988 election and became the forty-first president of the United States. His victory seemed impressive at first glance. Not since Herbert Hoover had a candidate succeeded a retiring president of his own party and not since Martin Van Buren had a vice president been elected to the Oval Office. Overcoming a 17-point deficit in July, Bush won an 8-point victory in November, capturing 40 states. While the comeback was impressive, his victory did not amount to a landslide. Only 57 percent of the voting age population choose to cast a ballot, the lowest such turnout since Calvin Coolidge beat John D. Davis in 1924. This meant that only roughly 27 percent of the adult population had actually voted for

Bush. Many cynics argued that the 1988 election had been plagued with a growing sense of frustration among voters. According to this view, "neither candidate was addressing the issues that most concerned them. The message, if either man had one, had got drowned out by the mudslinging."101 Bush entered into the presidency with no clear mandate from the country and with no clear agenda on how to correct the domestic policy problems that had been created by the deficit spending of the Reagan years. With Democrats achieving net gains in both houses of Congress, governorships, and in the state legislatures, Bush would have little chance of pushing forward a domestic agenda even if he had one.102 Bush turned to an area where he would have greater freedom to form an agenda and an area where he had considerable expertise: foreign policy.

101 Ibid., 418.
102 Bush was the first president since William Howard Taft to have been elected while his party suffered net losses in each house of Congress, governorships, and state legislatures.
During the 1988 election, George Bush billed himself as the candidate of continuity. A vice president who had faithfully served an enormously popular president pledged to continue in his footsteps. While avoiding specifics, Bush promised that he would build on the achievements of his predecessor. Such campaign rhetoric, however, did more than just win Bush the election. It has shaped how the public, and many political observers and historians, have viewed these years. Historical interpretation considers this part of American history as the “Reagan-Bush years,” indicating that Bush’s term could best be explained as Reagan’s third term. There is some validity to such attempts at periodization, especially on domestic issues. But too often scholars gloss over the differences between President Reagan’s and President Bush’s approach to foreign policy, particularly toward the Soviet Union. This distinction is partly a result of a muddled view of the end of the Cold War. A common misconception is that the Cold War was basically over by the end of the Reagan administration and that Bush merely needed to wrap up the agreements that Reagan had already negotiated. This argument completely disregards the ever-changing realities of foreign policy and underestimates the potentially explosive situation in Eastern Europe that still existed when Reagan left office.

Reagan’s policy of peace through strength had all but guaranteed that the Cold War would come to an end. The Soviets simply no longer had the resources to match the military build-up of the Americans. From its highpoint in the 1950s, the Soviet Gross

Table 2.1

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<th>Population (millions)</th>
<th>GNP per capita (dollars)</th>
<th>GNP (billions of dollars)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>11,360</td>
<td>2,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>4,550</td>
<td>1,205</td>
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When Reagan unveiled his plan for his expensive Strategic Defense Initiative, the Soviets knew that their economy could not maintain the arms race for much longer. As Marlin Fitzwater recalls:

In all the summit meetings that I was in with Reagan and Gorbachev, every one of them ended in the Soviet Union's plea toward getting us to drop SDI.... And their problem was that they felt they couldn't afford to match it. And so they knew; that's when they started getting serious about arms reduction. Their view was, we don't have the money to ever build a space-based system; let's get out of the arms race. So they started reducing nuclear weapons. President Bush kept the pressure on in the same way when he met with Gorbachev and then with Yeltsin, after Yeltsin replaced him in '90, their goal was still the same. They still focused every meeting on how to get us to back out of SDI. So President Bush wanted to hold that pressure point out there all through his four years as well.\footnote{Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.}
Brent Scowcroft agrees with the fact that the Soviets simply could not afford to match SDI:

I think they were afraid of SDI because ... not so much because they thought it would work, but that if we went down that path, they would have to follow and it was too expensive for them. They didn't have the resources.4

If SDI had ever become operational, the Soviet defense budget would have the added pressure of producing even more rockets and warheads. Perhaps even more troubling for the Soviets was the American advancements in lasers, optics, supercomputers, guidance systems, and navigation. As one historian has observed:

Russia has always enjoyed its greatest military advantage vis-à-vis the West when the pace of weapons technology has slowed down enough to allow a standardization of equipment and thus of fighting units and tactics—whether that be the eighteenth-century infantry column or the mid-twentieth-century armored division.5

With a larger Russian investment needed in advanced technologies, one Russian spokesman warned of "a whole new arms race at a much higher technological level."6

Taking into consideration the dramatic shift in each country's GNP, the Soviets simply could not maintain the arms race much longer. Critics of Reagan's approach to arms control, most notably Brent Scowcroft, have pointed out that SDI tended to stymie negotiations because Reagan refused to use it as a bargaining tool. Reagan viewed SDI as too important to use as leverage to get other things the United States wanted from the Soviets. Consequently, he never put SDI on the table. By the time Reagan left office, the question for U.S. policymakers had changed from how does democracy

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4 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
5 Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, 500.
defeat communism to how does democracy help communism go away in a peaceful way.

The Bush administration was able to manage the end of the Cold War so that it ended with a whimper and not a bang.\(^7\) They were able to accomplish this in part by making a fundamental change in the foreign policy approach that had been used by the Reagan administration. During arms control negotiations, Reagan had placed the emphasis on numbers, reducing numbers by eliminating certain kinds of weapons. George Bush’s national security advisor Brent Scowcroft disagreed with that approach. He had viewed President Reagan’s rush toward disarmament as “a mighty dubious objective for grown-ups in this business.”\(^8\) General Scowcroft believed that simply getting rid of certain kinds of weapons did not achieve the overall goal of arms control, which was to improve stability. Instead, he wanted to reduce the chances that in a crisis either side would resort to the use of nuclear weapons for fear of some vulnerability in the nuclear arsenal. That was a goal that could not be accomplished simply by a shift in numbers. Historically, negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union had centered on arms control. General Scowcroft hoped to shift the focus to Eastern Europe. He wanted to take advantage of the ferment that was growing in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland, to force the Soviet army out of Eastern Europe, or at least reduce their presence so that Eastern Europeans could develop in a progressive way. This meant putting arms control on the back burner until the situation in Eastern Europe unfolded; a move that would require a fundamental change.

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7 James A. Baker III, telephone interview by author, 22 May 2000.
8 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
in U.S. foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. For the president who had promised to continue on the course set by his predecessor, this had the potential for drawing criticism, especially from the right-wing establishment who had always doubted Bush’s credentials as a conservative. Rather than make an abrupt change, President Bush conducted a lengthy foreign policy review at the beginning of his term in office. The foreign policy review would allow him to make his own imprint on the nation’s foreign policy and make sure that there had not been an overly aggressive effort made by the Reagan administration to conclude a deal with the Soviets before time ran out.  

The National Security Council  

The formulation of foreign policy in the Bush administration centered on the National Security Council, an inner circle of men that had the complete confidence of President Bush. Bush’s NSC was markedly different from the one that had existed during the Reagan presidency. Reagan’s foreign policy advisors were full of suspicion and mutual mistrust, in the words of James Baker, “a witches’ brew of intrigue, elbows, egos, and separate agendas.” Baker, claims not to “remember any extended period of time when someone in the National Security cluster wasn’t at someone else’s throat.” The fact that Ronald Reagan went through seven national security advisors during the eight years that he was in office indicates that something was wrong.

9 Ibid.
11 The National Security Council has four statutory members: the president, vice president, secretary of state, and secretary of defense. The director of Central Intelligence, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the national security advisor also attend NSC meetings and serve as statutory advisors.
Reagan's seventh national security advisor, Colin Powell, described Reagan's National Security Council as "rudderless, drifting, demoralized." That flaw started in Reagan's first year as president. In an effort to end the rivalry that had existed between the NSC and the Department of State during the Carter administration, Ronald Reagan decided to downgrade the post of national security advisor. To facilitate this objective, National Security Advisor Richard Allen's office was placed under the supervision of Presidential Counselor Edwin Meese III. Thus, the national security advisor lost direct access to the president for the first time since the NSC had been created in 1947.

Reagan drove home the point in subsequent public statements by stressing that his secretary of state was his "primary advisor on foreign affairs, and in that capacity, he is the chief formulator and spokesman for foreign policy for this administration." Reagan made clear that the State Department would handle foreign affairs decisions in his administration while the National Security Administration would merely be responsible for the "integration" of the policies proposed by the State Department.

Further changes in the NSC were made at a February 25, 1981, meeting, which established three Senior Interdepartmental Groups (SIGs), chaired by the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, and the director of Central Intelligence, respectively. Each SIG would deal with specific issues through a series of assistant secretary-level Interdepartmental Groups (IGs). That same year Reagan went on to establish the

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15 The National Security Council was established by the National Security Act of 1947 and amended by the National Security Act Amendments of 1949. Later in 1949, as part of the Reorganization Plan, the Council was placed in the Executive Office of the President.
Special Situation Group (SSG) and the National Security Planning Group (NSPG). It seemed that policy would be formulated anywhere but in formal meetings of the NSC; and Reagan’s first national security advisor resigned within a year. The situation did not improve as the Reagan administration went on to form an additional 22 SIGs and 55 IGs, which allowed NSC officials such as Colonel Oliver North to establish their own sub-domains. The role of the NSA became more prominent during the tenures of William Clark and Robert McFarlane; however, too many people played activist roles in the management of daily U.S. foreign relations problems. That lack of cooperation and organization became evident to the public during the Iran-Contra Affair and the subsequent appointment of the Tower Board that made recommendations for the reform of the NSC. During that investigation, Congress found that subordinates would sometimes ignore the wishes of the president and pursue their own policy schemes. Ironically, Bush would appoint to his National Security Council two men, John Tower and Brent Scowcroft, who had served on the Tower Commission that investigated Reagan’s NSC during the Iran-Contra Affair. The Tower Board would recommend that the size of the NSC staff be reduced, a legal counsel be appointed, and that the Crisis Pre-Planning Group be replaced with a Policy Review Committee. The NSC largely withdrew from its operational roles while the Board’s recommendations were implemented, maintaining a low profile for the rest of Reagan’s administration.

National Security Advisor Frank Carlucci and his successor Colin Powell would use the time to implement many of the changes suggested by the Tower Commission. As Colin Powell recalls:

16 "History of the National Security Council, 1947-1997,” official National Security...
My own view is that, and this is a very self-serving view as you can imagine, that when Mr. Carlucci took over and I was his deputy we restored a sense of process and discipline to the National Security Council and its functioning. Then there were some additional changes in personality when Mr. Carlucci went to the Pentagon and Mr. Weinberger left. And a more cooperative relationship emerged between the Department of Defense and the NSC. And I would say that it continued into and through the Bush administration.17

By the start of the Bush administration, the changes in the NSC would once again allow it to play a constructive role in policymaking without fear of the improprieties experienced during the Iran-Contra Affair. Ironically, it would be one of the lead members of the Tower Commission that Bush would entrust to complete the changes in the NSC.

At the center of Bush’s foreign policymaking team was his national security advisor Brent Scowcroft, a retired Air Force lieutenant general. Scowcroft had spent much of his time in the Air Force both studying and teaching international relations. His credentials included a Ph.D. from Columbia University, as well as teaching stints at West Point, the U.S. Air Force Academy, and the Naval War College. He had worked for the Department of Defense, served as deputy national security advisor under Henry Kissinger during the Nixon administration, and succeeded Kissinger as President Ford’s national security advisor. After 1976, Scowcroft worked for Kissinger Associates as an international consultant. During the Reagan administration, Scowcroft served on various committees, including the Tower Commission that was formed in 1986 to investigate the Iran-Contra Affair. Although he had many close friends in the Reagan administration, including the vice president, Scowcroft had privately been one of the fiercest critics of Reagan’s foreign and military policy. He

felt that Reagan’s initial hard-line approach was foolish and that his subsequent blind embrace of Gorbachev was naïve. Scowcroft especially objected to Reagan’s policy on nuclear deterrence, terming Reagan’s 1986 Reykjavik proposal to eliminate all ballistic missiles as “insane.”


Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.

Bush’s selection of Scowcroft sent a clear message to Washington insiders that he intended to change the direction of defense and foreign policy. Scowcroft’s style also suited Bush’s preference for staying out of the limelight and working quietly behind the scenes. Scowcroft’s low-profile, self-effacing approach won Bush’s complete trust. Bush recalled that Scowcroft “worked the longest hours of anyone in the White House.”


In selecting him, I would also send a signal to my cabinet and to outside observers that the NSC’s function was to be critical in the decision-making process.

It was clear that Bush intended to rely on the NSC, and Scowcroft, more than anyone else, would prove to be the chief architect of the foreign policy approach of the Bush administration. He answered directly to the president and always made sure that a

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17 Colin Powell, telephone interview by author, 7 August 2000.
20 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
third person was present to make a record of everything that was discussed and agreed upon, something that was not always the case with the Reagan administration. Even critics of the administration conceded that the NSC ran more smoothly under Scowcroft.

Scowcroft was joined on the National Security Council by Bush’s campaign manager James Baker, who had been offered the position of secretary of state just two days prior to the 1988 election (See figure 2.1). Baker was one of Bush’s oldest friends, going back to his pre-political days in Texas, where the two met in 1959 at a cookout when a mutual friend suggested that they become tennis partners at the Houston Country Club. The two men went on to win two club championships and form a lifelong friendship. After Baker’s first wife died of cancer in 1970, it was Bush who was responsible for getting Baker interested in politics by involving him in his 1970 Senate campaign. In 1975, Bush helped get Baker his first public job when he persuaded President Ford to appoint Baker as under secretary of commerce. Baker had a large ego and could be abrasive if he felt that his time was being wasted. As Baker has admitted, he and his staff “did not suffer fools gladly.”

Baker’s critics have characterized him as a consummate pragmatist and tough politician. His years as a successful lawyer, however, allowed him to operate in a conciliatory manner when he wanted to gain an edge over someone. When he adopted this nonconfrontational technique, he could cleverly guide, or persuade, people to “chose” the option that he had intended all along. This type of strategy earned him the nickname “the Velvet

21 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 19.
22 Baker with DeFrank, The Politics of Diplomacy, 32.
Figure 2.1. Bush, Scowcroft, and Baker would prove to be the chief architects of Bush's foreign policy. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
Hammer” and allowed him to refrain from making too many enemies. It was a technique that he used while running Bush’s campaigns and one that would serve him well when dealing with foreign leaders. All in all, Baker was tough, very competitive, a strong negotiator, and someone Bush could count on to state how he felt directly and forcefully, even when it was not the advice that Bush wanted to hear. Baker recalls that he often was the recipient of one of Bush’s favorite jabs: “If you’re so smart, why am I vice president [or president] and you’re not?” This usually indicated to Baker that Bush was cutting short their discussion because he did not like the advice he was offered. There were many times when the two men disagreed and became angry with one another, but neither man would voice his displeasure publicly. In the Bush administration, friendship and loyalty went hand in hand. That loyalty went with Baker as he assumed his new position at the State Department. In an interview with Time magazine following his appointment, Baker stressed that he intended to be “the president’s man at the State Department, not the State Department’s man at the White House.” Baker was determined to make it clear that President Bush made foreign policy, not the Foreign Service.

Dick Cheney became secretary of defense after John Tower’s nomination failed because of allegations of alcohol abuse. Cheney was a close friend of Scowcroft and shared his pragmatic, no-nonsense work ethic and lack of ego. His graduate degree in political science, stint as President Ford’s White House Chief of Staff, and six terms in Congress were valuable assets. While chief of staff, Cheney routinely

23 Ibid., 20.
attended National Security Council meetings. At the time of his appointment, Cheney
was serving as the senior Republican on the Budget Subcommittee of the Intelligence
Committee, which authorized the activities of all intelligence programs. He had,
therefore, a depth of understanding in very specific areas that come within the general
jurisdiction of the Department of Defense and national security in general. His
greatest asset, however, was his friendship with key members of the Bush
administration. The close working relationship that Bush, Scowcroft, Baker, and
Cheney had cultivated during the Ford administration ensured that the national
security apparatus would function smoothly. Friction was handled privately. Baker
was preparing for his first visit to Moscow in May 1989. Just prior to this trip, on
April 29, Dick Cheney agreed to a CNN interview, during which he surmised that
Gorbachev’s push for perestroika would “ultimately fail.” For the secretary of defense
to be predicting Gorbachev’s failure publicly would certainly have cast a shadow over
Baker’s trip to Moscow. Cheney called Baker and agreed with him that he had said
something that was better left unsaid. Baker claims that it was the only major
disagreement with Cheney involving turf during the entire administration.

The role of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had gone through serious
changes during the Reagan administration. The Defense Reorganization Act of 1986
gave the chairman of the JCS real power. Since its creation in 1949, the power of the
chairman was limited to presenting the secretary of defense and the president with the

25 The President’s News Conference: March 10, 1989,
26 Baker with DeFrank, The Politics of Diplomacy, 70.
watered-down consensus recommendations of the chiefs. As head of his own service, each chief had a separate agenda and a unique perspective of events. Decision papers from the JCS tended to be guided by the least-common-denominator that “every chief would accept but few secretaries of defense or presidents found useful.” The 1986 act designated the chairman of the JCS as the “principal military advisor” who could give his own advice directly to the secretary of defense and the president. Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr. was chairman when the 1986 reorganization went into effect. Bush allowed Admiral Crowe to finish out his term until he retired at the end of September 1989. When it came time to decide on a replacement, Cheney advised Bush to consider Colin Powell, who had served as Reagan’s national security advisor during the last year of his administration. Powell was one of the few people from the Reagan administration whom Bush had considered for the new team, offering him the job of deputy secretary of state or director of the CIA. Powell had declined both offers, deciding to return to the Army as commander in chief of Forces Command, a position responsible for all Army field forces based in the United States and carrying a promotion to four star general, the Army’s highest rank. Later in the year when Bush made him the offer to vault to the highest uniformed military post in the land as chairman of the JSC, it was too good to pass up. Both men were concerned with the fact that Powell was the most junior of the 15 four-star generals who were legally eligible for the chairmanship. Despite Bush’s and Powell’s reservations, Cheney was

27 The Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 is commonly referred to as the Goldwater-Nichols Act because it had been sponsored by Senator Barry Goldwater and Congressman Bill Nichols.

convinced that Powell’s tenure as National Security Administration as well as his military command credits had uniquely prepared him to operate between the Pentagon and the White House with ease. Assuming the position of chairman on October 1, 1989, Powell became the first chairman to begin his tenure with the added benefit of Goldwater-Nichols authority. Powell explains the importance of Goldwater-Nichols:

[It helped] to the extent that Goldwater-Nichols did not require me to speak with the corporate voice. In other words, I can speak in my own right as principle military advisor. All the other chiefs are military advisors to the president as well. But, because the chairman is the principle military advisor, I did not need the chief’s vote on what my advice should be for the corporate body. That was of enormous help.30

But, as Powell recalls, just as important was the confidence that Bush and Cheney had in his ideas:

The great influence that I was able to use was the influence given to me by my superiors. The fact that Mr. Cheney found the ideas that we came up with useful and that the president found them useful and relevant to the challenges they had is really what made it work more so than bureaucratic imprimatur of Goldwater-Nichols.31

The relationship between Powell and Cheney in particular would become quite strong and add to the cohesion of the National Security Council.

One of the few hold-overs from the Reagan Administration was William Webster, who was asked to continue his role as the director of Central Intelligence. Despite having no background in intelligence or foreign policy, Webster had been offered the job as DCI upon the death of William Casey and in the aftermath of the Iran-Contra Affair. Labeled by Newsweek as “Washington’s most successful Mr. Fixit,” the Missouri lawyer and former federal judge had served as director of the

29 Powell with Persico, My American Journey, 388.
Federal Bureau of Investigation from 1978 to 1987, helping to reverse the agency’s image that had been blighted by the legacy of J. Edgar Hoover. As the new DCI, Webster ended the off-the-books covert operations that had been routinely organized by Casey. Prior to Webster’s new guidelines, as then deputy director Robert Gates recalls, covert operations “was a very informal kind of process, [but] now they actually sit down and debate the issue. They talk about it; they go through a long checklist of questions.”

He also dramatically improved the CIA’s relationship with Congress, something that had been virtually ignored by Casey. But, Webster’s main priority was to make a firm distinction between intelligence and policymaking. As the first director of Central Intelligence to be named a member of the Cabinet, Casey had all but obliterated that line. Refusing to be appointed to that rank, Judge Webster defined his role as informing and implementing policy, not making it. He even went so far as to say that it was none of his business what policymakers did with his intelligence estimates. In fact, Webster wanted to make the relationship between the director and president “professional and not a political relationship.” This matched President Bush’s concept of the role of the DCI. Having served as DCI himself, Bush had a very set idea about the role that the director of the CIA should play in an administration. It was clear that the DCI would provide the president with intelligence information but otherwise have no role in policymaking decisions.

As vice president, Dan Quayle also served on the NSC. His interest in arms control involved him in many of the discussions of the NSC; however, his input was

31 Ibid.
usually only considered when it, at least loosely, fell in line with the direction in which Bush was already leaning. In an administration dominated by people with far more experience in foreign affairs, Quayle was primarily involved in domestic policy and congressional maneuvering. Even he admits that his contribution to foreign policymaking during the Bush administration was marginal.\textsuperscript{34} He was, however, a faithful observer to the decision-making process. Each morning he attended the president’s daily national security briefing with Scowcroft and CIA briefers. He would then stay for Bush’s meeting with the chief of staff to set the agenda for the rest of the day.

Quayle continued to favor programs from the Reagan era such as SDI and he continued the strong anti-Soviet rhetoric that was prevalent during Reagan’s first term. While this endeared Quayle to the right wing of the Republican party, it made Bush’s more moderate advisors wary of Quayle’s input. Quayle, therefore, was not a significant contributor to foreign policymaking during the Bush administration. His many hard-line speeches, however, did help mollify the right wing of the Republican party, who never really trusted Bush, and gave Bush some political cover to institute his own, more moderate, foreign policy decisions. Qualye’s speeches also allowed the Bush administration to be critical of the Soviet Union and congressional Democrats without the criticism coming directly from the president. Bush could then distance himself from the comments using an often-repeated line: “I haven’t seen what he said,

so I can’t tell you whether he speaks for me. I speak for myself. He speaks for himself.”

One final person that should be mentioned is Marlin Fitzwater. Although not officially a part of the NSC, Fitzwater attended the NSC meetings, sitting quietly to one side. He had decided early in his job as press secretary that he needed to attend National Security Council meetings and other foreign policy discussions in order to absorb the nuances of foreign policy and the rationale for policy changes. Reagan had allowed him this unusual level of access and Bush, somewhat reluctantly, agreed to the continuation of this practice. During his six years with Reagan and Bush, he was never asked to leave a meeting, and his presence paid off with his improved ability to explain to the public the actions taken by the NSC.

Together, these men represented a very capable NSC that Bush would rely on during the dramatic events leading to the end of the Cold War. That does not mean, however, that the NSC collectively made the decisions concerning foreign policy. As Brent Scowcroft recalls, President Bush always made the final decision. Perhaps because of his extensive background in foreign affairs, Bush enjoyed debating issues with his advisors (See figure 2.2). He asked question after question, provoking people to defend their views. This helped him clarify the issues in his own mind and allowed him to make prudent, well-reasoned decisions. According to Scowcroft, “Rarely did

35 An example of this occurred when the Tower nomination failed in the Senate. Quayle made a blistering speech in Indianapolis that accused Senate Democrats of using “McCarthy-like tactics” to defeat John Tower. Although Bush privately agreed with that statement, he could not publicly condemn the actions of Senate Democrats because he still had several nominations that needed to be confirmed in the Senate.

Figure 2.2. Bush enjoyed debating issues with his advisors, a process markedly different than under President Reagan. *Clockwise around the room:* Bush, Scowcroft, Deputy National Security Advisor Robert Gates, Sununu, Cheney, and Baker. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
[Bush] make major decisions without a lot of back and forth with his advisors in order to set things in his own mind."37 This was a markedly different process than that which occurred during the Reagan administration. As Colin Powell, who served on both President Reagan’s and President Bush’s NSC, recalls:

President Reagan relied more on his advisors to shape issues for him, and President Bush got a little more deeply involved in the shaping of the issues but didn’t constrain his staff. And he wanted to hear more of the in and out, up and down and dialogues over the various issues than President Reagan.38

In the final analysis the NSC during the Bush administration was better qualified, was more stable, had more clearly defined roles, and played a greater part in the decision-making process than it had under President Reagan.

The National Security Review of the Soviet Union (NSR-3)

With its foreign policymaking team in place, the new administration was ready to assess the improvements in the U.S.-Soviet relationship that occurred during Reagan’s second term. Unlike Reagan, who was often seen as detached from the process, Bush’s knowledge and interest in foreign affairs placed him at the center of policy-making discussions. Out of this close-knit group emerged a consensus characterized by both skepticism of Gorbachev and criticism of Reagan’s anti-nuclear weapons enthusiasm. A foreign policy review finally got underway weeks after the inauguration. It quickly became clear to those conducting the review that it was a waste of time and manpower. Many of the senior bureaucrats throughout the government were holdovers from the Reagan administration, and as one frustrated official exclaimed, “If we had any better ideas than the ones we had, we would have

37 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
38 Colin Powell, telephone interview by author, 7 August 2000.
used them." The process drifted on for over three months. Privately, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze begin to refer to the policy review as the *pauza*—the pause. Even Bush officials, such as Robert Gates, began to refer to it as "the pause." Many observers outside of the administration criticized Bush for not seizing what they felt was a clear course of action inherited from Reagan. Jack Matlock, the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, angrily explained to colleagues at the State Department, "Our marching orders are clear: 'Don't just do something, *stand there!*'" Matlock argues that the Bush administration was slow in recognizing that Gorbachev understood that the Cold War was coming to an end and was ready to make concessions. According to this view, the Bush administration was slow in testing Gorbachev's words. Matlock also sees practical considerations for the pause. He believes it was intended by the Bush administration to reassure the right wing of the Republican party and to allow time for a complete overhaul of the government in terms of personnel:

[Bush] purged almost everybody from the top ranks of the government. At one point, I know Baker had told me in a private meeting, when he asked me to stay on in Moscow, that, well, you know, they had run three political campaigns and he's got a lot of people that he has to take care of. Now clearly he didn't consider the people who had worked for Reagan their people. So I think they did look at their own backers as distinct from the Reagan backers. And their political task was not having the Reagan backers defect. Since many of the right-wing Republicans had thought Reagan had gone soft his last year or so, you know Bush had to sort of stand up and, I think, show that he was tougher.

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41 Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, 34.
42 Jack F. Matlock, Jr., interview by author, Boston, Massachusetts, 6 January 2001.
Matlock, therefore, criticizes the foreign policy review as taking place largely for political reasons rather than necessitated by foreign policy concerns, which he felt warranted decisive action. James Baker argued that these critics were missing the main goal behind the lengthy foreign policy review:

Any new administration, even if it’s one of the same party, has got to put its imprint on foreign policy, and you needed to have a Bush imprint on the nation’s foreign policy. Also, you needed to make sure there had not been an overly aggressive effort to conclude a deal just, you know, just before time ran out with the Soviets. Nothing had been concluded. Also, you had to, you know . . . Vice President Bush had not really been in those meetings with Gorbachev. He had to satisfy himself that Gorbachev was for real. The Cold War still was on. You have to remember that. They were still supplying weapons through Cuba to Nicaragua. There was still the Angola problem. We had major arms control negotiations going on, and many of them were stuck. Chemical weapons was stuck. Sea launch cruise missiles and the linkage with START was a sticking point. We had a lot, there’s still a lot of problems.43

Those problems could not be addressed adequately by simply continuing Reagan’s emphasis on reducing numbers of weapons. Bush needed to know if Gorbachev was actually prepared to fulfill his promises for fundamental change. Baker felt that Gorbachev’s strategy depended on his ability to split the alliance in Western Europe by appealing to Western publics rather than Western governments. This strategy would also elevate his own authority and stature within the Soviet Union. The only way to keep Gorbachev from gaining the advantage over the United States, according to Baker, was to “attack his strategy head-on and to craft initiatives that he would feel obliged to embrace.”44 After making such bold promises, Gorbachev could not easily say no to any positive initiatives from the West.

44 Baker with DeFrank, The Politics of Diplomacy, 70.
When the formal report from the strategic review on the Soviet Union (NSR-3) was presented to Bush on March 14, 1989, it was a big disappointment. As Brent Scowcroft recalls:

> The chief problem with the policy reviews is that they didn’t produce anything. They were sort of bureaucratic exercises, and it’s not surprising that the bureaucracy thought everything was going well because they had designed the policy. So mostly we got back studies that said do more of the same. That was the principal problem, and as a result, we just fashioned policies ourselves within the NSC and then debated them in the NSC.45

The “big picture” document did not provide the kind of specific initiatives that were needed, and Bush simply was not satisfied with the approach suggested by the review that was quickly labeled “status quo plus.” He and his team wanted policies that could cope with the radical change that was taking place in Eastern Europe. The Bush administration wanted “to signal the bureaucracy, the Congress, the media, and the public at large that it was time for a reassessment of old assumptions.”46 The review did not further that goal. As Baker explains:

> Unfortunately, we made two mistakes in the way we set up the review. First...the review was run by Reagan administration holdovers. Since they were responsible for the development and articulation of the previous policy, these officials naturally had a personal and psychological investment in the status quo. It was pretty much like asking an architect to review his own work; he might change a door here or a window there, but it would be unlikely for him to question the basic foundations on which the structure stood. Needless to say, these officials found themselves incapable of truly thinking things anew. Second, instead of asking for ideas and suggestions from sources without a vested interest in established policy, we asked the bureaucracy itself to produce the papers. This resulted in least-common-denominator thinking, with every potentially controversial—that is, interesting—idea left out in the name of bureaucratic consensus. In the end, what we received was mush.47

45 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.  
47 Ibid.
Another disappointing aspect concerning the review was that it was ambivalent about whether or not Gorbachev could succeed in his efforts at reform. The report on the Soviet Union had suggested that Gorbachev had about a 50-50 chance at overcoming his domestic problems and succeeding with his reforms and that because of the uncertainty surrounding Gorbachev’s ability to maintain power, U.S. policy should not be designed to either help or hurt Gorbachev. This was unacceptable to Bush. He needed to know that Gorbachev was a true reformer and that he could trust that Gorbachev would be successful. Bush needed to determine if perestroika was a breathing space (peredyshka) designed to overcome the stagnation and technological backwardness of the Brezhnev era and to revive the Soviet economy for further competition with democracy and capitalism into the twenty-first century, or if it was a fundamental shift (perekhod) in Soviet policy ushering in a new era of socialism.\(^4\)\(^8\)

The review offered no clear answers to these questions.

**The End of “the Pause”**

Scowcroft explained how the NSC shifted its focus: “we worked instead with a ‘think piece’ on Gorbachev’s policies and intentions, drafted by an NSC team headed by Condoleezza Rice.”\(^4\)\(^9\) Rice’s memo laid out a four-part approach that Scowcroft used as a blueprint to guide the development of an overall strategy.\(^5\) First, the administration needed to work on the domestic side to strengthen the image of America’s foreign policy as driven by clear objectives. Second, it needed to send a clear signal that relations with its allies was the top priority. A unified NATO was key

\(^4\) Ibid., 69.

to arms reduction talks. Third, the United States should undertake initiatives, particularly economic assistance, with Eastern Europe, a potential weak link in the solidarity of the Soviet bloc. Fourth, the United States should promote regional stability around the world. Rice’s memo eventually led to the end of the pause. Until then, however, the Bush administration continued to be criticized for its foreign policy review. Marlin Fitzwater recalls the problems created by the lengthy foreign policy review at the beginning of Bush’s term in office:

The press is always an impatient group. I mean, a day is forever in the news business. And you promise a policy review and they expect to have it tomorrow or the next day. And if it drags on for six or eight months, something like that, that seems like a long time and you’ve got to expect you’re going to start getting editorials and others saying, “Where’s that policy review?” So, you always have to deal with media impatience.

The Bush administration started to see attacks from the press. One article in the Washington Post even reported that Ronald Reagan was telling close friends that he had an “uneasy” feeling about Bush’s “foreign-policy indecisiveness” and felt that Bush’s hesitancy was allowing Gorbachev to regain the momentum in public opinion:

The Reagan view when he left office was that Bush had a clear advantage in dealing with the Soviets because he had inherited policies he had helped shape. Instead of plunging ahead with negotiations, however, Bush opted for the delaying tactic of a policy review, behaving the way new presidents do when replacing someone from the opposing party with different views.

Reagan had been trying to avoid public criticism of Bush because he did not want to undermine him; however, it was clear that Reagan was starting to lose his patience.

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50 Rice’s memo would eventually evolve into National Security Directive 23, which was finally signed by Bush on September 22, 1989.
51 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 40.
52 Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.
with his successor. George Kennan, creator of the policy of containment, also criticized Bush. While testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Kennan blamed Bush for failing to respond to Soviet initiatives. Margaret Thatcher sent Bush a message complaining that the policy review was taking too long.\(^{54}\) When Gorbachev announced on April 7, 1989, that he was halting production of weapons-grade uranium and closing two plutonium plants, reporters pressed Bush for a response. Bush snapped back at reporters: “We’ll be ready to react when we feel like reacting.”\(^{55}\) Bush knew that he had to announce his new policy goals soon. The Bush administration also knew that the press, as well as the public at large, were expecting some kind of climax to the policy review. After eight years of Reagan, people had come to expect grand speeches and dramatic press conferences. Certainly something as important as a fundamental shift in policy toward the Soviet Union would have required a prime time televised report to the nation in the Reagan era. Typical of Bush’s press style, his staff put together a series of four speeches that read more like position papers, and that would constitute the conclusion of the review: one speech each on Eastern Europe, Western Europe, the Soviet Union, and defense and arms control. None were televised nationally.

**Commencement Season**

Originally, all four of the speeches were to be given at university commencement ceremonies. A historic agreement forced the speech on Eastern European policy to be moved up to April, well before the commencement season began. The opportunity to launch the new policy of encouraging reform in the

\(^{54}\) Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, 49.
governments of Eastern and Central Europe suddenly developed with the successful completion of ongoing talks between the Polish government and Solidarity, the first independent trade union behind the Iron Curtain. That agreement, signed on April 5, 1989, legalized Solidarity, created a new and powerful office of president along with a new 100-seat senate, and allowed for the opposition to compete for seats in the senate as well as for 161 of the 460 existing seats in the Sejm, or parliament. The event required an American response. The Polish Communist Party had maintained a forty-five-year monopoly of power. Now Poland was apparently moving outside of communist control and would be allowed autonomous political development. It was exactly the sort of reform that the Bush administration intended to promote all over Eastern Europe and provided an ideal opening for Bush's speech. White House planners chose Hamtramck, Michigan, as a good place to hold a speech on Eastern Europe. The Detroit enclave had an unusually high concentration of blue-collar families with ties to Poland, as well as the rest of Eastern Europe. Only two problems existed: the new policy still had not been clarified and the speech itself still needed to be written. Even after the long policy review, it had not been decided what kind of assistance the United States could afford to offer Eastern Europe. In the post-Reagan era, the huge federal deficit forced budgets to be extremely tight. Bush had committed that new programs would not be approved unless funds could be diverted from other parts of the budget. Bush, however, knew that his plan required economic aid if it had any chance of working and instructed his planners to find the money somewhere. Perhaps the more difficult problem was deciding who would write the speech. The

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55 Ibid., 50.
controversy, one of the few reoccurring disputes within the foreign policy apparatus of the administration, was between the NSC, who felt that they should be responsible for national security policy speeches, and the president’s speechwriters, who felt that they should write all of the president’s speeches. In the end, the two sides reached an uneasy compromise; however, as Brent Scowcroft recalls, “It remained a major irritant, with a negative impact on the quality of many of the President’s foreign policy speeches throughout the Administration.” The speech was finally given by President Bush on April 17 at Hamtramck City Hall:

My friends, liberty is an idea whose time has come in Eastern Europe.... The West can now be bold in proposing a vision of the European future: We dream of the day when there will be no barriers to the free movement of the peoples, goods and ideas. We dream of the day when Eastern European peoples will be free to choose their system of government and to vote for the party of their choice in regular, free, contested elections. And we dream of the day when Eastern European countries will be free to choose their own peaceful course in the world, including closer ties with Western Europe. And we envision an Eastern Europe in which the Soviet Union has renounced military intervention as an instrument of its policy—on any pretext. We share an unwavering conviction that one day, all the peoples of Europe will live in freedom.... Let us recall the words of the Poles who struggled for independence: “For your freedom and ours.” Let us support the peaceful evolution of democracy in Poland. The cause of liberty knows no limits; the friends of freedom, no borders.

In that speech, Bush promised new American trade and credits to countries experiencing economic and political reforms. This established a link between help from the West and significant political and economic liberalization. The Bush team hoped that by offering economic rewards, they could keep reform going in Eastern

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57 Ibid., 51.
58 Remarks by the President to Citizens of Hamtramck, April 17, 1989, George Bush Presidential Library, Subject File: Foreign Policy Speeches, 4/89 – 2/90, Box #13. Video footage provided by the George Bush Presidential Library.
Europe. They also hoped to eventually extend the link between aid and reform to the
Soviet Union itself. Unfortunately, the speech at Hamtramck also showed that the
United States did not have the resources to provide the level of rewards that could
genuinely stimulate the troubled economies of Eastern Europe. The administration,
however, had finally taken a position on Eastern Europe. As Brent Scowcroft recalls:

It was only a beginning, but it was a crucial move to try to capitalize on the
signs of thaw in the communist states of Europe and to steer events in
productive directions, but at a speed Moscow could accept. It was a serious
effort to address the central questions of the Cold War.59

The speech was covered in full detail by the press in Europe and the Soviet Union, but
at home Bush’s first foreign policy address received very little attention.

Administration officials would later admit that part of the problem was of their own
making. The White House did very little advance work with the press, and many of the
Washington reporters simply refused to believe that Bush would make any important
announcements at Hamtramck. Marlin Fitzwater explains the problems behind using
the series of speeches to unveil the new policies:

No, they weren’t nationally televised. Well, the problem was, first of all, we
had to have some way to put it out. And secondly, the review that took place
was a more informal one between the president, the national security advisor,
Brent Scowcroft, Secretary of State Baker, Secretary of Defense Cheney, and
so it was, ya know, it didn’t lend itself to kind of being published in a book.
This review really was, amounted to a lot of private discussion, a lot of
meetings they had had and so forth. So they needed some way to kind of say to
the American people, “Here’s what my policies are going to be.” And the
speeches simply were a, seemed to be, the most effective tool for producing
three or four documents on three or four different areas of foreign policy that
outlined where he intended to go from here.60

59 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 52.
60 Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.
The first speech, which should have been a dramatic beginning to Bush’s plan for
foreign policy, was an easily forgettable event. Bush’s preference for
compartmentalization and behind-the-scenes discussions kept the American public
uninformed during the first months of his presidency. Now, his failure to learn the
nuances of image management, something his predecessor had mastered, left much of
America still unsure about the direction he wanted to pursue. The second speech
would be equally as undramatic.

The president’s commencement speech at Texas A&M University in College
Station on May 12, 1989, announced his strategy for future policy toward the Soviet
Union (See figure 2.3). Drawn primarily from a decision memorandum written by the
NSC staff and based on an earlier memo written by Condoleezza Rice, the speech
called for a fundamental transformation of the U.S-Soviet relationship. It recognized
that the Soviet Union was in the midst of change; however, it challenged the Soviet
Union to action to demonstrate their commitment to Gorbachev’s principles. Bush’s
policy, called “beyond containment,” was explained in National Security Directive 23:

The character of the changes taking place in the Soviet Union leads to the
possibility that a new era may now be upon us. We may be able to move
beyond containment to a U.S. policy that actively promotes the integration of
the Soviet Union into the existing international system.... But a new
relationship with the international system can not simply be declared by
Moscow. Nor can it be granted by others. It must be earned through the
demilitarization of Soviet foreign policy and reinforced by behavior.... We are
in a period of transition and uncertainty. We will not react to reforms and
changes in the Soviet Union that have not yet taken place, nor will we respond
to every Soviet initiative. We will be vigilant, recognizing that the Soviet
Union is still governed by authoritarian methods and that its powerful armed
forces remain a threat to our security and that of our allies. But the United
States will challenge the Soviet Union step by step, issue by issue and
institution by institution to behave in accordance with the higher standards that
the Soviet leadership itself has enunciated.... The goal of restructuring the
Figure 2.3. Bush's commencement speech at Texas A&M University on May 12, 1989, called for a fundamental transformation of the U.S.-Soviet relationship that would move "beyond containment." (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
relationship of the Soviet Union to the international system is an ambitious task. The responsibility for creating the conditions to move beyond containment to integrate the Soviet Union into the family of nations lies first and foremost with Moscow. But the United States will do its part, together with our allies, to challenge and test Soviet intentions and, while maintaining our strength, to work to place Soviet relations with the West on a firmer, more cooperative course than has heretofore been possible.\textsuperscript{61}

The speech given by President Bush mirrored the language of the NSC memorandum:

\begin{quote}
The Soviet Union says that it seeks to make peace with the world, and criticizes its own postwar policies. These are words that we can only applaud. But a new relationship cannot simply be declared by Moscow, or bestowed by others. It must be earned. It must be earned because promises are never enough.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

Bush challenged the Soviets to reduce their conventional forces, abandon the Brezhnev Doctrine, and allow self-determination for all of Eastern and Central Europe, in the process removing the Iron Curtain. He urged diplomatic solutions to regional conflicts, respect for human rights, and for the Soviet Union to work with the United States to solve drug-trafficking and environmental dangers. Bush resurrected Open Skies, a plan first introduced during the Eisenhower administration that allowed unarmed aircraft from the United States and the Soviet Union to fly over the territory of the other country opening military activities to regular scrutiny. Many considered Open Skies as proof that the Bush administration could not come up with anything new. After months of delay, the Bush administration simply dusted off a plan thirty years old. Unlike Eisenhower in the 1950s, Bush could rely on satellites to do the type of surveillance work that could be done by unrestricted flights over the Soviet Union.

\textsuperscript{61} National Security Directive 23: United States Relations with the Soviet Union, George Bush Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{62} Remarks by the President at Texas A&M University, May 12, 1989, George Bush Presidential Library, Subject File: Foreign Policy Speeches, 4/89 – 2/90, Box #13. Video footage provided by the George Bush Presidential Library.

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Certainly, the Open Skies proposal was outdated. Even a protective Brent Scowcroft admitted that the proposal “smacked of gimmickry.”\textsuperscript{63} Bush thought that the Open Skies proposal would show that his administration was acting boldly. He was wrong.

The speech on Western Europe was delivered at Boston University on May 21, 1989. Bush had just spent a weekend at his home in Kennebunkport, Maine, with French president François Mitterrand. Reagan and Mitterrand had never been close. Reagan had been greatly troubled by Mitterrand’s promise in 1981 to place communists in his government. Mitterrand felt that Reagan was too obsessed with communism and that he wrongly categorized all communists as aggressive Stalinists. Bush hoped that the relaxed setting in Maine would allow him to get to know Mitterrand on a personal basis. The salt air and waves pounding against the rocks provided a setting that was very different from the protocol and formalities of the Reagan years. It was Bush’s style of personal diplomacy at its very best, and it helped establish a deep level of trust and personal rapport between the two presidents. So it was that Mitterrand accompanied Bush to Boston and followed Bush’s speech with one of his own. Afterwards, the two leaders gave a joint press conference. In his address, Bush delivered a warning to those who would rush blindly into Gorbachev’s proposals for Europe:

\begin{quote}
We must never forget that twice in this century, American blood has been shed over conflicts that began in Europe. And we share the fervent desire of Europeans to relegate war forever to the province of distant memory. But that is why the Atlantic Alliance is so central to our foreign policy. And that’s why America remains committed to the Alliance and the strategy which has preserved freedom in Europe. We must never forget that to keep the peace in Europe is to keep the peace for America. NATO’s policy of flexible response keeps the United States linked to Europe and lets any would-be aggressors
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{63} Bush and Scowcroft, \textit{A World Transformed}, 54.
know that they will be met with any level of force needed to repel their attack and frustrate their designs. And our short-range deterrent forces based in Europe, and kept up-to-date, demonstrate that America's vital interests are bound inextricably to Western Europe, and that is an attacker can never gamble on a test of strength with just our conventional forces. Though hope is now running high for a more peaceful continent, the history of this century teaches Americans and Europeans to remain prepared. As we search for a peace that is enduring, I'm grateful for the steps that Mr. Gorbachev is taking. If the Soviets advance solid and constructive plans for peace, then we should give credit where credit is due. And we're seeing sweeping changes in the Soviet Union that show promise of enduring, of becoming ingrained. At the same time, in an era of extraordinary change, we have an obligation to temper optimism—and I am optimistic—with prudence.... it is clear that Soviet "new thinking" has not yet totally overcome the old.

Stressing that the Soviet Union still kept a formidable military machine in Europe,

Bush pledged his determination to negotiate a less militarized Europe:

I believe in a deliberate, step-by-step approach to East-West relations because recurring signs show that while change in the Soviet Union is dramatic, it's not yet complete. The Warsaw pact retains a nearly 12-to-one advantage over the Atlantic Alliance in short-range missile and rocket launchers capable of delivering nuclear weapons; and more than a two-to-one advantage in battle tanks. And for that reason, we will also maintain, in cooperation with our allies, ground and air forces in Europe as long as they are wanted and needed to preserve the peace in Europe. At the same time, my administration will place a high and continuing priority on negotiating a less militarized Europe, one with a secure conventional force balance at lower levels of forces. Our aspiration is a real peace—a peace of shared optimism, not a peace of armed camps.

Bush made clear in his speech that a strong NATO became more important, not less, with the changes occurring within the Soviet Union. It certainly was not the time for the West to be overcome by complacency or division.

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64 Remarks by the President at Boston University Commencement Ceremony, May 21, 1989, George Bush Presidential Library, Subject File: Foreign Policy Speeches, 4/89—2/90, Box #13. Video footage provided by the George Bush Presidential Library.
65 Ibid.
The fourth and final speech was delivered at the Coast Guard Academy commencement, May 24, 1989, focusing on defense strategy and arms control. Bush emphasized his commitment to maintaining an effective nuclear deterrent but promised to seek arms reductions that would allow stability with the lowest number of weapons that the administration felt was prudent. Any advance in arms control, however, would have to be prefaced by a Soviet move away from an offensive military strategy:

The USSR has said that it is willing to abandon its age-old reliance on offensive strategy. It’s time to begin. This should mean a smaller force—one less reliant on tanks and artillery and personnel carriers that provide the Soviet’s offensive striking power. A restructured Warsaw Pact—one that mirrors the defensive posture of NATO—would make Europe and the world more secure.66

Thus, the series of speeches that had been designed to announce the conclusion of the administration’s long foreign policy review came to a conclusion and the “pause” was now officially over. Brent Scowcroft summed up the new strategy that was unveiled with the four speeches:

It was cautious and prudent, an appropriate policy in a period of turbulence and rapid change, but it proved surprisingly durable and established a valuable framework for the conduct of policy. We were shifting policy from the old and narrow focus on strategic arms control to a wider dialogue designed to reduce the threat of war and bring real peace—including progress in Eastern Europe, CFE (conventional forces in Europe), and regional issues. All this was aimed at encouraging a “reformed” Soviet Union, ready to play a trustworthy role in the community of nations—one far less threatening to the United States and its allies.67

66 Remarks by the President at the Coast Guard Academy Graduation Ceremony, May 24, 1989, George Bush Presidential Library, Subject File: Foreign Policy Speeches, 4/89—2/90, Box #13. Video footage provided by the George Bush Presidential Library.
67 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 55-56.
The new strategy was a major departure. After serving as a loyal vice president for eight years, Bush was determined to make his own mark on foreign policy distinct from his predecessor. Former national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski had claimed that the NSC had entered its “mid-life crisis” during the Reagan years. Restoring the NSC to its former importance would be Bush’s first order of business. To facilitate this goal, he issued the first National Security Directive of his presidency, NSD 1, which reorganized the National Security Council. Along with making fundamental changes in the NSC machinery, Bush appointed a trusted friend in Brent Scowcroft to be his national security advisor, thereby elevating the authority of the position. Bush, Scowcroft, Baker, and Cheney would make all of the important foreign policy decisions. Bush’s years of experience in foreign affairs necessitated a more hands-on approach that was markedly different than the complex system of SIGs and IGs that had been used by Reagan to delegate authority. The long policy review and the anti-climactic speeches that laid out the new policy helped provide a period of gradual transition that protected Bush from charges from the Right that Bush was not loyally following in Reagan’s footsteps. By the summer of 1989, however, it was clear that the White House rather than the State Department would be in charge of foreign policy and that Bush, along with his close advisors, would bear the responsibility for reacting to the incredible change that was happening in Central and Eastern Europe and within the Soviet Union itself. It would be up to this small group of men to manage the end of the Cold War and make sure that it ended with a whimper and not a bang.

December 7, 1988: it was sunny as Mikhail Gorbachev rode the ferry to Governors Island in New York’s harbor. He had just come from delivering an important speech at the United Nations announcing massive unilateral military cuts. He was the first Soviet leader to speak at the United Nations since Nikita Khrushchev in 1960. Now he was on his way to his fifth and final meeting with Ronald Reagan and his first meeting with George Bush since the president-elect’s victory in November. As Colin Powell recalls:

The meeting was really as a result of a request from President Gorbachev. I was national security advisor and we were not expecting to have any more summits or meetings. Really, it was not a summit. In fact, we carefully did not call it a summit. But we were not planning to have any more meetings with Gorbachev, and suddenly he said, “Well I’m going to be in the United Nations.... and would like to meet and have one final go at it, to talk.” And so it was hard to say no at that point.... he initiated it and, of course, we accepted it. No reason not to accept it. We made clear to the Soviets, however, that we were not looking for a substantive exchange. It was a good way to say goodbye Reagan-Gorbachev and also say hello to President Bush.1

The White House team selected the U.S. Coast Guard station on Governors Island for the sight of the luncheon. Security would be relatively simple to maintain; the Statue of Liberty served as the dramatic backdrop for what was sure to be a historic opportunity for photographs. One last meeting between old friends, however, masked underlying motives behind the meeting. Gorbachev wanted to size up the new president and receive assurances that there would be continuity in the relationship between the two countries after Inauguration day on January 20, 1989. Even though

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1 Colin Powell, telephone interview by author, 7 August 2000.
the two men had met at the Chernenko funeral and the Washington summit,

Gorbachev wanted to see for himself if President Bush, now free to make his own
decisions, would be different than Vice President Bush, who always supported
Reagan’s policies. As Colin Powell recalls, the proposed meeting was a difficult
situation for Bush:

There was nervousness on the part of President Bush and his associates that
perhaps the Soviets might try to throw some proposal at us that they would
have to deal with before they had even come into office.²

It was a difficult position for Bush. He was officially there as Ronald Reagan’s vice
president. Bush decided to finish out his job as vice president. He refused to bring
James Baker, his nominee for secretary of state, lest it give the wrong signal to
Gorbachev. When Reagan walked out to meet Gorbachev as his car pulled up, Bush
dutifully stayed inside until the two men had exchanged greetings and only then
nonchalantly walked outside (See figure 3.1). Just prior to the luncheon, Reagan was
asked by a reporter to respond to Gorbachev’s announcement to reduce troops. His
response: “I heartily approve.” The reporter then turned to Bush who awkwardly
replied, “I support what the President said.” It was clear that Bush was not ready to
announce what his policy would be as president. Later, Bush quietly told Gorbachev
that he looked forward to working with him “at the appropriate time.”³ The
appropriate time, however, would be a while in coming. Bush and his foreign policy
team had not yet decided how they were going to proceed. At least, they were not
ready to announce their plan to the world because it would be markedly different from

² Ibid.
³ Don Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era: The United State and the Soviet
The meeting at Governors Island on December 7, 1988, was the last official one between Reagan and Gorbachev. More importantly, it was the first between Gorbachev and President-elect Bush since his victory in November. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
that of Ronald Reagan. Bush’s loyalty to Reagan made his transition from vice
president to president a slow and difficult process.

Bush’s change in foreign policy was orchestrated by his closest advisor, one of
the Reagan administration’s critics, Brent Scowcroft. Scowcroft was convinced that
the Cold War could only be brought to a conclusion if it ended where it had begun: in
Central and Eastern Europe. More specifically, the Cold War had begun in Germany
after World War II. The United States and the Soviet Union split Germany in two,
creating spheres of influence that would pit the two sides against each other. In order
for the confrontation to end, the German question would have to be tackled. As
Scowcroft recalls:

I wanted... to focus on Eastern Europe. There was ferment in Eastern Europe,
especially in Poland. And I wanted to take advantage of that ferment to try and
get the Soviet army out of Eastern Europe, or at least reduce their presence to
allow the Eastern Europeans to develop in a progressive way.4

This might seem like an obvious decision; however, Reagan strongly disagreed.
Reagan was obsessed with reducing nuclear weapons and more concerned with arms
control discussions with Gorbachev than substantive proposals to reshape Central and
Eastern Europe. As for the German question, Reagan’s assistant secretary of state
Rozanne Ridgway summed up the administration’s position by arguing that the
existing situation was stable and a source of peace and that renewed debate over the
reunification of Germany would be premature and unwise.5 Despite the
recommendations of the outgoing Reagan officials, many of whom worked on the
Bush foreign policy review before leaving office, Scowcroft was committed to shifting

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4 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
American policy. He recommended that “the goal of U.S. policy should be to overcome the division of the continent through the acceptance of common democratic values.” The Bush administration, however, was careful not to make the same mistakes that had started the Cold War in the first place. Scowcroft, and particularly Baker, wanted to make sure that their initiatives would not give the impression that the United States and the Soviet Union were getting together to carve up Eastern Europe. They also did not want to bring about reckless change at a pace that might end in violence. As Scowcroft recalls:

We did not stimulate ferment in Eastern Europe. We had done that earlier in the '70s and indeed in the '50s when we helped stimulate the Hungarian revolt and so on. That turned out to be counter productive because when we turned people out in the streets, we weren’t prepared to support them. So what we tried to do was encourage reform at a level that we thought would be below that the Soviet Union would think they would have to crush it. So we wanted to keep it going but we didn’t want it smashed, as was usually the case with revolt in Eastern Europe with all the leaders killed or put in prison. And that’s what we tried to do and it turned out, you know, because of our skill or because of luck it turned out that that was very effective in this case.

To facilitate this type of change, the administration hoped to provoke change but never direct intervention. Bush made two European trips to further this goal. The first, in the spring of 1989, was to Western Europe and coincided with the NATO summit that was scheduled to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the alliance. The second was in the summer of 1989 and focused on Eastern Europe and ended with the G-7 economic summit in Paris. These two presidential trips, along with the speeches scheduled for the commencement season, gave the administration the opportunity to lay out its new

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7 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
policy initiatives and put pressure on other governments to respond. This was, in reality, a diplomatic offensive that finally allowed the new administration to break free from the Reagan-era policies and forge a new course, which even though still somewhat fragmented, was more in line with Scowcroft's goal to capitalize on the ferment in Eastern Europe.

The NATO Summit

The NATO summit presented the Bush administration with some interesting challenges. Gorbachev had undertaken an intense public relations campaign. His speeches about peace and democracy in Eastern Europe were well publicized, placing pressure on the West to respond. His message resonated with many European political leaders who questioned the need for defense spending at current NATO levels. At a time when Gorbachev seemed to be moving beyond the Cold War, the United States was still "dourly debating tanks and missiles." This, coupled with Gorbachev's dramatic arms control announcements in his speech to the United Nations in December, had placed the West on the political defensive. Both Baker and Scowcroft were determined to use the NATO summit to establish Bush as the sole leader of the alliance and gain the initiative. The two topics that needed to be addressed at the summit were the reduction of conventional (non-nuclear) forces in Europe (CFE), and the modernization and possible reduction of short-range nuclear forces (SNF). The general public tended to perceive these issues as boring; however, Scowcroft knew that the Cold War would continue as long as the U.S. and Soviets maintained opposing armed camps in Europe. The Bush administration needed to find a way to reduce the
hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops, which they pinpointed as the true source of Europe’s insecurity. This type of fundamental change had not been included in Gorbachev’s flashier, yet less meaningful, arms control proposals. The way for the United States to affect change was to have an alliance in full agreement on the solutions and united behind President Bush. To reach this goal, the Bush administration began working on proposals to present at the NATO summit.

The SNF problem was made difficult because of West Germany. NATO needed modern nuclear forces to offset the conventional superiority of the Warsaw Pact. In West Germany, however, Chancellor Helmut Kohl faced increasing public resistance because short-range missiles, with a range of 300 miles, would in all likelihood be directed at targets within Germany or Poland. The Germans even had a sardonic maxim: “The shorter the missile, the deader the German.”9 Understandably, a strong anti-nuclear movement in the Federal Republic began to call for the elimination of the current 88 SNF launchers (as opposed to around 1,400 for the Soviets!).10 In 1987, NATO had agreed to delay the decision on modernization until a comprehensive plan could be formulated, scheduled to be finished by the 1989 summit. The United States, supported by most of the alliance, felt that the Warsaw Pact’s superiority in conventional forces had to be addressed before major changes in NATO’s nuclear weapons could be discussed. The Bush administration faced increasing pressure to

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create both a CFE proposal and a SNF proposal before the NATO summit. As Scowcroft recalls:

From our perspective, resolving the differences in time for the summit, and doing so in a way that would strengthen NATO unity and put us out in front of Gorbachev, presented the first test of President Bush's alliance leadership.11

In March 1989, NATO and the Warsaw Pact had agreed to a proposal presented by Baker of unequal CFE reductions to create and equal level of forces at about 5-10 percent below the current NATO levels. The proposal was criticized as insufficient; Bush pushed for larger cuts. Less than two weeks before the summit, Bush sat down with his most trusted advisors to discuss a CFE initiative. Scowcroft and Baker pushed for bold cuts; Crowe and Cheney voiced objections. President Bush had the deciding vote: "I want this [more radical proposal] done. Don't keep telling me why it can't be done. Tell me how it can be done."12 The result was President Bush's Conventional Parity Initiative, which proposed a 20% cut in U.S. and Soviet troops in Europe and establish a ceiling of approximately 275,000 each. This would force the U.S. to withdraw and demobilize 30,000 troops and would require the Soviets to reduce their 600,000–strong Red Army in Eastern Europe by 325,000. In addition, President Bush proposed a reduction to parity of all tanks, armored troop carriers, artillery, and land-based combat aircraft and helicopters to a ceiling of 15% below the current NATO totals; weapons removed were to be destroyed. The president proposed that this reduction to parity be negotiated within 6 months to a year and that it be implemented

11 Ibid., 60.
12 Baker with DeFrank, The Politics of Diplomacy, 94.
by 1993 at the latest. Bush knew that he would need the support of the major NATO leaders for his idea to work and sent Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger and Deputy National Security Advisor Robert Gates to Europe to win the support of Thatcher, Mitterrand, and Kohl.

The NATO summit took place on May 29-30, 1989, in Brussels (See figure 3.2). Bush knew that his public image in regards to foreign policy rested on the outcome of the summit. President Bush presented his CFE proposal in the formal session. Margaret Thatcher praised Bush’s initiative, claiming it would promote unity within the alliance. Mitterrand then asked to speak. He offered his full support:

...good for the alliance because we can’t give the impression of merely standing in place…. We need innovation. The president of the United States has displayed imagination—indeed, intellectual audacity of the rarest kind…. Those advising me said ‘no’ to aircraft…. But I told them they were wrong. I told them we must be bold, as the American president wants us to be. President Bush, I again congratulate you.14

Bush had scored the public victory that he had sorely needed. The alliance agreed that SNF negotiations leading to a partial reduction would begin, once implementation of conventional force reductions was underway. One London newspaper said that Bush had ridden “to the rescue like the proverbial U.S. cavalry, at the last possible moment.”15 Reporters in the United States would now have trouble accusing the Bush administration of lacking vision.

13 A full description of the Conventional Parity Initiative can be found in President Bush’s “Proposals for a Free and Peaceful Europe,” Current Policy No. 1179, published by the United States Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Washington, D.C.
14 Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 79.
Figure 3.2. Baker and Bush at the NATO Summit in Brussels, May 29, 1989. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
Bush traveled to Germany to make one of the most important speeches of his presidency. In his address in the Rheingoldhalle in Mainz, Chancellor Kohl’s home turf, Bush linked the end of the Cold War to an end of the division of Europe:

For 40 years, the seeds of democracy in Eastern Europe lay dormant, buried under the frozen tundra of the Cold War. And for 40 years, the world has waited for the Cold War to end. And decade after decade, time after time, the flowering human spirit withered from the chill of conflict and oppression. And again, the world waited. But the passion for freedom cannot be denied forever. The world has waited long enough. The time is right. Let Europe be whole and free.\(^{16}\)

He went on to issue an ultimatum:

The Cold War began with the division of Europe. It can only end when Europe is whole. Today, it is this very concept of a divided Europe that is under siege. And that’s why our hopes run especially high, because the division of Europe is under siege not by armies, but by the spread of ideas.... It comes from a single powerful idea—democracy.... As President, I will continue to do all I can to help open the closed societies of the East. We seek self-determination for all of Germany and all of Eastern Europe. And we will not relax and we must not waver.... But democracy’s journey East is not easy.... Barriers and barbed wire still fence in nations.... There cannot be a common European home until all within it are free to move from room to room.... The path of freedom leads to a larger home—a home where West meets East, a democratic home—the commonwealth of free nations.\(^{17}\)

Bush made clear that the Cold War would not end until the division of Europe ended.

His reference to the “commonwealth of free nations” was a deliberate response to Gorbachev’s call for a “common European home.” In essence it was a direct challenge to the proposals made by Gorbachev. He argued that even though glasnost was a Russian word, openness was a Western concept. To that end, Bush called for free elections and political pluralism in Eastern Europe, cooperation in addressing

\(^{16}\) Remarks by the President at Rheingoldhalle, May 31, 1989, George Bush Presidential Library, Subject File: Foreign Policy Speeches, 4/89—2/90, Box #13. Video footage provided by the George Bush Presidential Library.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
environmental problems in the East, and a less militarized Europe. Perhaps his most
dramatic proposal, especially considering the venue for the speech, came when he
noted that Hungary was tearing down its barbed wire fence along its border with
Austria:

Just as the barriers are coming down in Hungary, so must they fall throughout
all of Eastern Europe. Let Berlin be next! Let Berlin be next! Nowhere is the
division between East and West seen more clearly than in Berlin. And there
this brutal wall cuts neighbor from neighbor, brother from brother. And that
wall stands as a monument to the failure of communism. It must come down. 18

Bush’s statement lacked the drama and showmanship of Reagan’s 1986 speech in
Berlin. But the message was clear: the division of Berlin and Europe must end.

Tiananmen Square Massacre

Immediately following his return from Europe, Bush had to deal with a crisis
in China that swept away many of the gains in Bush’s public image. On June 3-4,
1989, armed units of the People’s Liberation Army poured into Tiananmen Square in
Beijing, brutally dispersing thousands of student demonstrators with bullets and tanks.
The demonstrators had been gathering in the square since April 15 to mourn the death
of Hu Yaobang, former general secretary of the Communist Party. Hu, who was
removed from office in 1987 for excessive liberalism, was considered by many to be a
sincere reformer. Hard-liners within the government reacted harshly to the
demonstrators and sent police to breakup the demonstrations, beating students in the
process. Soon, the mourning of Hu transformed to protests against the government,
with calls for increased democratic freedoms, improvements in university living
conditions, a crackdown on corruption, and other political reforms. Adding to the

18 Ibid.
tensions was the scheduled visit of Mikhail Gorbachev on May 15, 1989. Western television crews had already arrived in Beijing to set up their cameras for the event and were able to cover the protestors. The international attention only fueled the students' protest and placed more pressure on the Chinese government. Many of the events planned for Gorbachev's visit had to be cancelled, as the ranks of the demonstrators swelled to almost a million. The government declared martial law and sent in the troops. The ensuing massacre was broadcast live to audiences around the world and created a problem that, as the following account by James Baker proves, the Bush administration had not anticipated:

The morning of Saturday, June 3, 1989, dawned clear and sunny in Washington. It was perfect golf weather.... On the spur of the moment, I called the Chevy Chase Country Club, then telephoned my eldest son, Jamie, at his home in suburban Alexandria, Virginia. It was about 9:30 A.M.

"I've got a great deal for you," I told him. "I've got a tee time at Chevy Chase in forty-five minutes. Grab your sticks and come on over right now and we'll play some golf."

"I don't think you're going to be playing any golf today," Jamie replied.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I'm sitting here watching tanks rolling through Tiananmen Square on CNN."

"You're kidding me."

"No."

After a few startled seconds of silence, I understood he wasn't. "Okay," I said. "I've got to go."

As I hung up, my other phone line rang. It was a duty officer at the State Department Operations Center, informing me that heavily armed units of the People's Liberation Army had indeed begun firing on demonstrators in the heart of Beijing. Casualties were expected to be heavy, I was told.19

Thanks to CNN, the American public knew about the crisis before the secretary of state. Public outrage in the United States was intense. Bush, however, was reluctant to upset the process of normalization that had been initiated by Nixon in 1972. President
Bush had a personal understanding of one of America's greatest Cold War strategic successes, having turned down ambassadorships in Paris and London to accept the job as chief of the United States Liaison Office in Beijing in 1974:

I wanted a measured response, one aimed at those who had pushed for and implemented the use of force: the hard-liners and the Army. I didn't want to punish the Chinese people for the acts of their government. I believed that the commercial contacts between our countries had helped lead to the quest for more freedom. If people had commercial incentives, whether it's in China or in other totalitarian systems, the move to democracy becomes inexorable. For this reason I wanted to avoid cutting off the sales and contacts. It was important that the Chinese leaders know we could not continue business as usual and that the People's Liberation Army realize that we wanted to see restraint. What I certainly did not want to do was completely break the relationship we had worked so hard to build since 1972.... While angry rhetoric might be temporarily satisfying to some, I believed it would hurt our efforts in the long term. 20

Angry rhetoric was exactly what the American public wanted. Although it might have been a solid diplomatic decision to show restraint, and although the United States was the first major government to impose sanctions on China after Tiananmen, what the public really wanted was to see a little righteous indignation from their president. Having failed to accommodate the public mood, Bush was heavily criticized by the press and Congress. It was on this note that President Bush embarked on his trip to Eastern Europe. It should have been a victorious follow-up to his successful NATO summit; however, Tiananmen and the criticism of Bush's restraint cast a shadow over his trip to Poland.

Bush's Trip to Eastern Europe

Ironically, the first round of parliamentary elections in Poland occurred the same day as the Tiananmen massacre. Solidarity's Civic Committee won 92 of 100

seats in the first round of Senate elections and 160 of the 161 Diet seats that were open for competition. In stark contrast, the governing coalition was only able to fill 5 of the 299 seats reserved for them. Only five of the Communist's candidates were elected. It was totally humiliating for the government because it was so completely unexpected. The result was the legitimization of Solidarity.21 Coupled with the surprising election results was Gorbachev's public rejection of the Brezhnev Doctrine:

"The political and social order in one country or another has changed in the past and can also change in the future. Still, it is exclusively up to the peoples themselves. It is their choice. All interference, whatever its nature, in the internal affairs of a state to limit its sovereignty of a state, even from a friend or all, is inadmissible."22

The elections in Poland and Gorbachev's rhetoric accentuated the polarization within the Warsaw Pact that pitted the USSR, Poland, and Hungary against Romania, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria. The closed-door meetings of the Warsaw Pact heads of state and Party leaders in Bucharest, July 7-8, 1989, were filled with tension. Leaders such as Nicolae Ceausescu and Milos Jakes criticized Gorbachev's perestroika and called for action to put an end to the "counterrevolutionary" process that was occurring in Poland. It was becoming increasingly clear that the destruction of socialism's conquests through the policies of Gorbachev had the potential of turning violent. That made Bush's trip to Eastern Europe even more imperative. The situation in Poland became more complicated. The gains by the Solidarity had placed in jeopardy the election of General Jaruzelski, whose election was one of the central

20 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 89.
22 Ibid., 118n. (Translated from Pravda, 7 July 1989).
elements of the Roundtable agreements. Also, Poland was informally asking the United States for $10 billion in assistance over the next three years. It was under these conditions that Bush arrived in Warsaw on July 10, 1989. It was important for President Bush to show that he was backing the political and economic reform efforts in Eastern Europe. Due to its own huge deficit, however, the United States could not deliver substantial aid. A fact acknowledged by NSA Scowcroft:

The days were over when the United States could pick up the check for everything: a new Marshall Plan was not possible.\

The United States sought to share the economic burden with Western Europe. The proposal by Bush called for the rescheduling of Poland's $39 billion foreign debt, a request for $325 million in new loans from the World Bank, and $100 million from the United States. The package was inadequate for the needs of Poland. At a joint session of the newly elected Polish parliament, President Bush voiced his support of the momentous changes in Poland's political system:

The elections which brought us—all of us—together here today mean that the path the Polish people have chosen is that of political pluralism and economic rebirth. The road ahead is a long one, but it is the only road which leads to prosperity and social peace. Poland's progress along this road will show the way toward a new era throughout Europe, an era based on common values and not just geographic proximity. The Western democracies will stand with the Polish people, and other peoples of this region.\

Bush wanted a gradual process that encouraged change while maintaining order. His preference for a controlled process led him to support Jaruzelski over the Solidarity candidates. Jaruzelski, who was considering not even running for president because of

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24 Remarks by the President at Joint Session of Parliament, the Sejm, Warsaw, Poland, July 10, 1989, George Bush Presidential Library, Subject File: Foreign Policy Speeches, 4/89—2/90, Box #13.
Solidarity’s victory in the parliament election, asked for Bush’s advice during a private conversation. Bush urged him to run for election:

It was ironic: Here was an American president trying to persuade a senior Communist leader to run for office. But I felt that Jaruzelski’s experience was the best hope for a smooth transition.25

Later, General Jaruzelski would write in his memoirs that President Bush’s support played a crucial role in his election to the presidency.26

From Poland, Bush traveled to Hungary, the first American president to do so. Bush stepped to the podium, waved off an umbrella, and dramatically ripped up his speech. The crowds cheered him on as he spoke briefly of his support of the reform efforts being undertaken in Hungary. Near the end of his speech he noticed an elderly women who was standing near the podium, soaked from the rain. He quickly took off his raincoat and wrapped it around her shoulders. The crowd erupted and Bush walked into the crowd, shaking hands and wishing them well. It was a dramatic moment and one that showed the people of Hungary that the United States was committed to establishing a partnership with Hungary to promote lasting change. Bush then flew to Paris for the G-7 summit in hopes of convincing them to share the burden of helping Eastern Europe’s economic distress. He did just that, achieving the aims that he had promised to both Poland and Hungary and making the trip to Eastern Europe a very successful one. Energized and growing more confident, Bush decided that it was time to consider a meeting with Gorbachev.

Collision Course

At the same time as Bush’s trip to Poland and Hungary, Gorbachev was making a highly publicized trip to West Germany, calling for immediate cuts in short-range nuclear missiles in NATO. The proposals had gained Gorbachev attention in Germany; however, the proposals were designed to disrupt the gains that Bush had made at the NATO summit and create rifts within the alliance. Tactics such as this confirmed Bush’s decision to move cautiously in regard to Gorbachev. Bush and Gorbachev traveled Europe with competing messages: whether or not the West needed to wait for concrete actions by the Soviet Union. The ferment that was growing in Eastern Europe, however, was not going to wait for the West to decide between the competing views. The Bush administration knew that, as the changes in Eastern Europe accelerated, Gorbachev would face increasing pressure from hard-liners to intervene. After all, Eastern Europe was a buffer zone that separated the Soviet Union from the West. If its once-reliable allies began to slip away, the Soviet Union would lose much of the security that it had depended upon. It became increasingly unclear whether or not the Cold War would end with violence. The Bush administration knew that “dying empires rarely go out peacefully.”27 Bush became even more determined that the cataclysmic changes in world structure that were about to occur would take place without a shot being fired:

The dangers were ahead, and I would have to respond with even greater care as the Eastern Europeans pushed their own way to the future. We could not let the people down—there could still be more Tiananmens.28

26 Lévesque, The Enigma of 1989, 123.
27 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
28 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 131.
Realizing the growing need for a face-to-face meeting between the two men, Bush started the first draft of a letter on the flight home from the G-7 meeting in Paris that suggested just such a meeting:

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing this letter to you on my way back from Europe to the United States. My mind is full of the fascinating conversations that I had with people in Hungary and Poland and with the many world leaders gathered in Paris for France's bicentennial. Let me get quickly to the point of this letter. I would like very much to sit down soon and talk to you, if you are agreeable to the idea. I want to do it without thousands of assistants hovering over our shoulders, without the press yelling at us every 5 minutes about "who's winning," "what agreements have been reached," or "has our meeting succeeded or failed." Up until now I have felt that a meeting would have to produce major agreements so as not to disappoint the watching world. Now my thinking is changing. Perhaps it was my visit to Poland and Hungary or perhaps it is what I heard about your recent visits to France and Germany—whatever the cause—I just want to reduce the chances there could be misunderstandings between us. I want to get our relationship on a more personal basis....

Bush felt that the negotiations for a proposed meeting between the men should be done secretly as to avoid any outside pressures or competing public agendas. Consequently, he decided to bypass the normal channels of communication. Only Scowcroft, Baker, and Chief of Staff John Sununu knew of the letter. The final draft was presented to Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, Gorbachev's principal military advisor, at the end of July when he was visiting Washington, D.C. to discuss arms control.

Akhromeyev could be trusted to deliver the letter in absolute secrecy. Gorbachev responded within days of receiving Bush's letter. His messenger delivered Gorbachev's approval of the proposal, suggesting that the two leaders could meet as early as September. The only problem was finding a location. The two sides wrangled

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over location for weeks before President Bush’s brother, William “Bucky” Bush suggested the island of Malta. Malta would have two benefits. Gorbachev had already planned a state visit to Italy at the end of November and could easily adjust his schedule to include a trip to the island. Also, Bush, as an old Navy man, liked the idea of holding the conference at sea, recalling the Roosevelt-Churchill shipboard meeting in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland in 1941. A meeting aboard a ship limited the number of press and staff that could attend. Bush’s national security advisor Brent Scowcroft recalls:

> It was primarily more of a trust-building meeting. He [Bush] had wanted from the onset of his administration to talk with Gorbachev and I and I think Dick Cheney had held him back because historically the Soviet Union always profited by summits because there was an atmosphere that, you know the Cold War was over; we didn’t have to worry. And that always made it harder for us to get appropriations through Congress and so on. So we didn’t want—I didn’t want, and Cheney didn’t want—a summit until we had something specific to get from it, that is an arms control agreement or something else. And early in the administration we didn’t have anything yet. So the president acquiesced in holding off a summit. Then in the summer of ’89, as a result of his trip through Eastern Europe and what he saw there and his meeting with his European allies at the G-7 summit, he decided that he had to talk with Gorbachev, that things were moving too fast, that there was too much danger of misunderstanding, and so he had to talk with Gorbachev. But he, in fact, he didn’t even want to call it a summit. He wanted to call it an exchange of views, not to make agreements, which is what summits usually are, but just to exchange views. And he was delighted with the idea of a summit out away from everybody where the press couldn’t be hovering around and where there would be little pressure for either side to try to make negotiating points or debating points.  

Both Gorbachev and Bush looked forward to the Malta conference as a potential breakthrough in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Soon, however, events in Europe would add an even greater importance to the meeting in Malta.

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30 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
Gorbachev faced a crisis not on the agenda for Malta. Nationalists in the Baltics were calling for independence, claiming that the 1939 agreement between Hitler and Stalin which led to the annexation of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia had been illegal. Baltic nationalism threatened the integrity of the Soviet Union itself. It also had the potential to spread throughout the Soviet Union where Gorbachev’s strategies for political and economic reforms had made it increasingly difficult to maintain order. The United States had never recognized the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states. The risk of breaking a 50-year-old precedent of U.S. policy made it difficult for Bush to call for gradual change in the Baltics. Yet Bush worried that separatism could lead to a civil war that could end disastrously for the United States if nuclear weapons fell under uncertain control. Gorbachev seemed receptive to greater autonomy for the Baltics; however, if they pushed for separation, Gorbachev might feel pressure to resort to force. Separatism was spreading to other parts of the Soviet Union. In Ukraine, nationalists had marched in Kiev in support of independence. No matter how much he believed in perestroika, Gorbachev could not lose the Soviet Union’s second-largest republic, its primary source of food. A meeting between Gorbachev and Margaret Thatcher demonstrates just how delicate of a situation the outbreak of separatism in the republics had become:

Over luncheon with Thatcher, Gorbachev dismissed the problem of nationalism with the sweep of his hand. Recalling Charles de Gaulle’s remark on how difficult it was to preside over a country that manufactured more than 120 different kinds of cheese, he said, “Imagine how much harder it is to run a country with over a hundred and twenty different nationalities.” “Yes!” interjected Leonid Abalkin, a deputy prime minister who served as economic advisor to Gorbachev. “Especially if there’s no cheese!”

31 Beschloss and Talbott, At the Highest Levels, 108.
Even Gorbachev could not continue to gloss over the mounting problems that his political and economic reforms were causing in the Soviet Union.

The Fall of the Berlin Wall

Another problem was the situation in East Germany. In May 1989, Hungary dismantled the barriers along its border with Austria. “Vacationing” East Germans could slip across into Austria and make their way to West Germany. When Hungary officially opened their borders on September 10, over 10,000 East Germans poured across and made their way to the West. It was a public humiliation to the Warsaw Pact and threatened its cohesiveness. It was even a worse situation for the East German government. The rising discontent forced a series of resignations within the government. Repression was now seen as an unlikely option by the government. Gorbachev claimed that what was occurring in East Germany did not directly affect the Soviet Union and ordered the Soviet troops stationed in East Germany not to get involved. This, in effect, demonstrated the end of the Brezhnev Doctrine, which asserted the Soviet right to provide assistance, including military assistance, to any Communist nation where Socialism was in jeopardy. As Secretary of State Baker recalls, the Bush administration could no longer doubt that Gorbachev’s deeds matched his words:

What it proved to us was that the Soviet leadership had, in fact, as they had told us they had, ruled out the use of force to keep the empire together. That was the critical factor. They told us early on they weren’t going to use force to keep the empire together. And when they didn’t that proved that they were telling us the truth and that they could be trusted and that we could do business with them.32

East German leader Egon Krenz made a frantic call to Gorbachev asking for instructions. Gorbachev told him that the Soviets would not get involved and suggested that he open his borders. East Germany announced on November 9, 1989 that it was relaxing its border-control policy with West Germany. Citizens of East Germany could now leave the country without having to obtain special permission.

Ironically, several mistakes were made by the East German government that allowed for the historic change. The announcement did not mention the city of Berlin, which usually received separate status and had stricter exit visa requirements. Also, the new policy was not meant to take place until after it had been presented to the legislature; however, Günter Schabowski, a Politbüro member and reformist Communist, took it upon himself to announce the policy at the end of his daily press conference. As two Bush officials would later conclude:

The truth of the matter is that the hapless East German government had opened the Berlin Wall by mistake. In one of the most colossal administrative errors in the long, checkered history of public bureaucracy, the Krenz government abdicated responsibility of the most important decision in its history to the people in the street.33

Confused officials and observers did not understand exactly what was meant; rumors began to spread that all travel restrictions were dropped. Crowds formed along the Berlin Wall as border guards waited for instructions that would not come. Finally, guards gave in to the crowds and people crossed over into West Berlin. The atmosphere turned electric as jubilant crowds from both sides of the wall began a celebration of the wall’s collapse.

33 Zelikow and Rice, Germany Unified and Europe Transformed, 101.
"I’m not going to dance on the Berlin Wall"

In Washington, President Bush watched the celebration on television.

Bewildered, he remarked to his aides:

If the Soviets are going to let the Communists fall in East Germany, they’ve got to be really serious—more serious than I realized.\(^{34}\)

Bush’s press secretary, Marlin Fitzwater knew that the president needed to give the press his view on the historic changes taking place in Germany:

When the wire stories began coming in that people were breaking down the wall, I saw it the same way the White House press corps did: as a big news story to be handled immediately. I took the wire stories to the president, who was sitting in his study off the Oval watching on CNN as people climbed the wall and toppled over to the other side. He read the wires slowly, as if making an independent determination of their truth. “Do you want to make a statement?” I asked. “Why?” the president said. He knew me well enough to know that my question was really a recommendation. “Why?” I repeated. “This is an incredibly historic day. People will want to know what it means. They need some presidential assurance that the world is OK.” The president just looked at me. He understood the historic point, of course, but his vision was taking him into a future of German reunification, diminished communism, and a new world order to be established. “Listen, Marlin,” he said, “I’m not going to dance on the Berlin Wall. The last thing I want to do is brag about winning the cold war, or bringing the wall down. It won’t help us in Eastern Europe to be bragging about this.” “I understand that, sir,” I said, “but we have to show that we understand the historical significance of this. You don’t have to brag.” I paused to let him formulate a message in his mind, then added, “We can just bring the pool into the Oval Office, you will sit at your desk, and the whole thing will be very dignified and presidential.” “OK,” he said.\(^{35}\)

Reporters were herded into the Oval Office where President Bush was discussing the situation with Baker, Scowcroft, and Sununu (See figure 3.3). Bush sat at his desk with briefing books stacked on his desk, one opened to a map of Germany. Reporters huddled around the desk to record a brief statement from the president. Speaking

\(^{34}\) Beschloss and Talbott, *At the Highest Levels*, 132.

Figure 3.3. At his press conference in the Oval Office following the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, Bush urged caution, labeling the momentous occasion as simply “a good development.” (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
matter-of-factly and without any enthusiasm, Bush labeled the fall of the Berlin Wall as “a good development.” He went on to add:

I don’t think any single event is the end of what you might call the Iron Curtain. But clearly, this is a long way from the harshest Iron Curtain days.... Our objective is a Europe whole and free. Is it a step towards that? I would say yes. Gorbachev talks about a common home. Is it a step towards that? [with a shrug of his shoulders] Probably So.36

When asked by a reporter if there was a danger that things were accelerating too quickly, Bush responded:

We are handling it in a way where we’re not trying to give anybody a hard time. We’re saluting those who can move forward with democracy. We’re encouraging the concept of a Europe whole and free. And so we just welcome it.37

Lesley Stahl of CBS challenged his less than enthusiastic response:

Stahl: In what you just said, that is a sort of victory for our side in the big East-West battle. But, you don’t seem elated.

Bush: I’m elated. I’m just not an emotional kind of guy.... We’ll have Some suggest more flamboyant courses of action for this country. But, I think we are handling this properly... and so, the fact that I’m not bubbling over, maybe it’s getting along towards evening because I feel very good about it.38

While the president was responding to the criticism that he was not elated, he was leaning back in his leather chair, looking down into his lap and fiddling with a pen.

Fitzwater stood in the background, leaning against the wall, knowing that the president was not doing well:

From the beginning, he seemed uninspired. As he continued, the president did the one thing that made every Bush staffer start to sweat. He started sliding down in his chair. It was the absolutely ironclad signal that he didn’t like what

36 Press Statement on Berlin Wall, 9 November 1989, video footage provided by the George Bush Presidential Library.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
he was doing, didn’t want to be there, and probably going to show it. Soon he
was talking in a monotone, his head bowed and hands folded across his chest.39

To the American public, Bush seemed distracted and disinterested. He was out of
touch with the dramatic changes that they watched on television. At a time when he
could have used a strong public performance to lead the nation in its celebration of the
end of the Cold War, President Bush seemed to be asleep on the job. Even Bush
admitted that the press conference did not go well:

It was an awkward and uncomfortable conference. The press wanted me to
give a summation of the historic moment. Of course, I was thankful about the
events in Berlin, but as I answered questions my mind kept racing over a
possible Soviet crackdown, turning all the happiness to tragedy.40

Bush knew that the Cold War was still far from over. As Fitzwater recalls, Bush was
more concerned with ending the Cold War than with his image:

First of all, he didn’t give a damn about his image. And I specifically raised it ’cause I went to him and said, you know, the wall is coming down and you
need to say something here that’s going to be strong and show that the
president recognizes what’s happening and it’d be good for your image and so
forth. And he said to me he didn’t care about image. That this was not a time to
be worrying about that sort of thing. And that he wanted to respond in a way
that Gorbachev would understand and that would be supportive of moving
ahead in the future relationship. I mean, it’s one of Bush’s more admirable
traits in the sense that he had enormous discipline in order to do what he
thought was right for the country even at the personal risk of bad press and bad
publicity and image consideration. And he wouldn’t do it.41

Secretary of State James Baker also defended Bush’s decision:

I still think that history will prove that he was absolutely right in not trying to
stick it in the eye of the Soviets, not trying to goad them or, as everyone put it
at the time, “dance on the wall.” That would have been a terrible mistake
politically and diplomatically.42

39 Fitzwater, Call the Briefing!, 262-263.
40 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 149.
41 Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.
Certainly, Bush had very sound reasons for reacting in the cautious manner that he did. He feared that a Western celebration of the wall’s collapse might encourage a backlash by hard-liners in East Berlin and Moscow. But to a skeptical public, Bush’s actions built upon the images created by his lengthy foreign policy review and his reaction to the Tiananmen Square massacre to show that Bush, as a symbolic leader, did not live up to his promise to follow in the steps of Reagan. What the public did not know was that Bush was acting on a request sent to him by Gorbachev that very day. As Bush recalled:

On the day the Wall opened, Gorbachev sent messages to Kohl warning him to stop talking of reunification, and cabled me urging that I not overreact. He worried that the demonstrations might get out of control, with “unforeseen consequences,” and he asked for understanding. This was the first time Gorbachev had clearly indicated genuine anxiety about events in Eastern Europe. Heretofore he had seemed relaxed, even blasé, about the accelerating movements in the region away from communism and Soviet control. It was if he suddenly realized the serious implications of what was going on.43

To go against the wishes of Gorbachev would have seriously jeopardized the gains Bush hoped to accomplish at the upcoming Malta meeting. James Baker explained Bush’s fear:

He feared that it would make it tougher for us to continue to move forward positively with Gorbachev. You don’t stick it in somebody’s eye when something is fundamental and as big and important as that happens. You celebrate it but you do so in a more statesman like way. Because, that would have been counter productive for us to start . . . even today when we talk about winning the Cold War, and I see Gorbachev today, and even today when we talk about winning the Cold War, he takes offense at that. He says, “You didn’t win the Cold War; we came to an understanding, a peaceful resolution of our differences.”44

Even with Bush’s acquiescence to Gorbachev’s request, there was no denying that change was taking place at an unprecedented rate and that the fall of the Berlin Wall demonstrated that change to the world. As Brent Scowcroft recalled:

I think that what it did is mostly underscore the importance of the two leaders talking because unexpected events could turn into a crisis very easily. Gorbachev was very frightened by the fall of the Berlin Wall.45

The Malta Conference

Bush met with his National Security Council on November 30, 1989, in the Cabinet room of the White House.46 It would be the last meeting before his departure for Malta:

I don’t want to be begrudging. I don’t want to seem halfhearted. The purpose of what I’m going to be doing over there is to show Gorbachev that I support him all the way.47

The private statement by the president expressed his desire to use the Malta conference to act boldly and shed his public image. He did not mind being labeled as cautious, but he could not stand being called timid. Up to this point, Gorbachev had been the one to propose bold new initiatives and Bush had been the one who was seen as timid. He wanted to use Malta to reverse that situation. Bush was determined not to be “out proposed” this time. To that end, the Bush team had been working diligently to prepare a list of twenty possible initiatives that Bush could use in his initial presentation to Gorbachev. In the end, the list was trimmed to seventeen specific proposals. As newspapers began to observe, the goals for the meeting were changing:

45 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
47 Beschloss and Talbott, At the Highest Levels, 150.
"The Malta meeting is indeed a summit. No one any more on the U.S. side talks about a 'get acquainted’ meeting…”  

Gorbachev, on the other hand, had purposefully not come up with a list of proposals, taking Bush at his word that there would not be an agenda at the meeting. In past meetings, such as Reykjavik and Baker’s meeting with the Soviet leader earlier in the year, Gorbachev had been accused of diplomatic sneak attacks. Gorbachev was determined not to receive the same criticism at Malta. Dating back to his UN address the previous year, Gorbachev had spent the past year proposing bold initiatives. Now, he needed to attempt to consolidate whatever progress he had already made. He knew that any further arms control proposals at this point might create a backlash from hard-liners in the Soviet Union. He also knew that, even though the Bush administration was beginning to overcome the earlier doubts concerning Gorbachev’s sincerity, there was still strong doubt as to whether or not Gorbachev could remain in power. Nervous over the dissettling pace of events in Eastern Europe and the increasing uncertainty of the Warsaw Pact, Gorbachev desperately needed the United States to reaffirm the superpower status of the Soviet Union and his own status as Bush’s equal. One French newspaper described the Soviet leader’s mission at Malta: “Mr. Gorbachev is racing against time to preserve the USSR’s great-power interests.” It was becoming increasingly evident with the unfolding of events in 1989 that Gorbachev was the leader of a superpower in decline. He hoped to use Malta to portray to the world a U.S.-Soviet partnership that was based

49 Beschloss and Talbott, At the Highest Levels, 153-54.
on mutual understanding and mutual respect between equals. A letter to Bush from
former president Richard Nixon cautioned him that Gorbachev’s actions masked a
political necessity:

> There is no question but that he is a remarkable new kind of leader of the
> Soviet Union, and we welcome the initiatives at home and abroad that he had
> already taken. But when you examine the evidence, it is clear that what he is
> doing is making a virtue of necessity. This does not make him a virtuous
> leader.\(^5\)

Bush knew that Gorbachev was fighting for his political survival:

> I worried that we were dealing with a ticking bomb. We could not see what
> inside pressures were building against Gorbachev and his programs. We were
> getting hints from Moscow that one of Gorbachev’s objectives at Malta was to
> gain some sort of “understanding” for his situation and for the measures he
> might take to crack down. I could not give him that, and if I did, it would have
> a lasting historical, political, and moral price.\(^5\)

Bush also knew, however, that it was in his own best interests to publicly support
Gorbachev in order to bring a stabilizing influence to the dramatic changes that were
taking place. He made clear his support in his departure statement before leaving for
Malta:

> America understands the magnitude of Mr. Gorbachev’s challenges. And let
> there be no misunderstanding: We support perestroika.\(^5\)

Bush’s eight and a half-hour flight from Andrews Air Force Base to Valletta, Malta,
did not provide him with the rest he would need for the meeting. His sleep was
interrupted with phone calls from Washington, D.C., concerning a military coup

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\(^5\) *Letter from Richard Nixon to President Bush regarding comments on upcoming
Malta summit,* (6pp.), 11/16/89, Condoleezza Rice Files, National Security Council
Files, Malta Summit Paper (Preparation) December 1989 [3], George Bush
attempt in the Philippines that attempted to oust President Cory Aquino. By the time they reached Malta the next morning, the Bush team was a little worn down. During the Malta conference, Bush would stay on a guided missile cruiser anchored in Valletta harbor, the USS Belknap—the flagship of the Sixth Fleet (See figure 3.4). Also anchored in the harbor was a Soviet missile cruiser, the Slava, where the first meeting was scheduled to be held. The third ship that was scheduled to be involved in the talks was a large Soviet cruise ship, the Maxim Gorky, which was berthed at the dock and thus, the most secure and the place where Gorbachev would be staying (See figure 3.5). Bush spent the first day taking care of protocol with a visit to Malta’s prime minister, a visit to the USS Forrestal, and some time settling in aboard the Belknap. By the next morning, the weather had made a turn for the worse with twenty-foot waves and gale-force winds pounding the ships in the harbor. The venue for the first meeting was changed to the Maxim Gorky, which was in a far more protected position at the dock. Scowcroft recalls the feeling of “anticipatory tension” in the room as both sides greeted each other across a long table (See figure 3.6). Before leaving for Malta Bush had announced in his departure statement that:

My discussions with president Gorbachev will enable us to become better acquainted and to better understand each other’s views. We will not be negotiating. We will be talking about our hopes and concerns for the future.

53 Remarks by the President upon Departure to Malta and Brussels, The Rose Garden, November 30, 1989, Susan Koch Files, George Bush Presidential Library. Video footage provided by the George Bush Presidential Library.
54 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 162.
55 Memo to Scowcroft concerning departure and arrival statements for Malta with attached statements for President’s use, Susan Koch Files, George Bush Presidential Library.
Figure 3.4. During the Malta conference, Bush stayed aboard the USS *Belknap* (right), which was anchored near a Soviet SLAVA class missile cruiser (left). (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
Figure 3.5. Gorbachev preferred to stay on the more luxurious cruise ship, the *Maxim Gorky*, berthed at the dock. Because of the bad weather, the meetings were held on the *Maxim Gorky*. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
Figure 3.6. The first meeting of the Malta conference aboard the *Maxim Gorky*, December 2, 1989. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
Despite his public announcement, Bush began his presentation of the seventeen
proposals that his team had prepared. An hour and ten minutes later, Bush finished
talking.\textsuperscript{56} After presenting his avalanche of proposals, Bush joked to Gorbachev, “This
is the end of my non-agenda.”\textsuperscript{57} Gorbachev, of course, did not have any proposals of
his own. Instead he talked passionately about his desire to achieve a new U.S.-Soviet
relationship in which each side would work to help the other overcome its problems.
As Fitzwater recalled, Bush then leaned across the table and interjected that he had
already begun to move in that direction of mutual support:

“I hope you noticed that I didn’t dance on the wall when it came down.” And
Gorbachev said, “I did and I appreciate it very much.” And they talked then
about the language they would use to describe the new relationship in a post-
Berlin Wall situation.\textsuperscript{58}

The only real tense moment of the first meeting came when Gorbachev brought up the
fact that the Bush administration had been using the phrase “Western values” in
speeches and public statements to describe successful reform efforts in Eastern Europe
and the Soviet Union. As James Baker recalled, Gorbachev felt that the term portrayed
him as a loser and the USSR has having no values, or at least, not good ones:

Gorbachev felt \textit{Western} implied that reformers in the Soviet Union had not
embraced or subscribed to some sort of those values, when in fact he felt they
had. In his concern, I saw the classic Russian tension between the Slavophiles
and the Westernizers, “Why not call them ‘democratic values’?” I asked.
“That’s fine,” said Gorbachev, and with that understanding, we had forged a
new degree of cooperation, at the level of both personalities and principles.\textsuperscript{59}

After the morning meeting, Bush went back to the Belknap to have lunch with his
advisors before meeting with Gorbachev over dinner. But, as the weather continued to

\textsuperscript{56} Fitzwater, \textit{Call the Briefing!}, 259.
\textsuperscript{57} Bush and Scowcroft, \textit{A World Transformed}, 163.
\textsuperscript{58} Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.

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worsen, it became apparent that the evening meeting would have to be cancelled. At the end of the next day’s meeting, Gorbachev asked Bush to share in a joint press conference:

We did gain a deeper understanding of each other’s views. We set the stage for progress across a broad range of issues. And while it is not for the United States and the Soviet Union to design the future for Europeans or for any other people, I am convinced that a cooperative U.S.-Soviet relationship can indeed make the future safer and brighter.\(^6^0\)

The joint press conference and Bush’s statements provided Gorbachev with the symbolism of a new unity that he desperately needed. It was a dramatic symbol of the new relationship that the men had been able to achieve in the two-day meeting.

Certainly, the Malta meeting turned out to be very successful for both Gorbachev and Bush. More importantly, it was a key event in the ending of the Cold War. As Bush’s press secretary argued, it was the pivotal point in the change of the U.S.-Soviet relationship:

I would say that [Malta] was the pivotal point at which the West first recognized that Communism was changing and may collapse. And we met with the purpose of trying to define how that could happen, what our role would be, and how we could help guide the future of whatever Russia emerged.... And I remember a memo from General Scowcroft to President Bush... for Malta that laid out three different scenarios of what might happen in the Soviet Union. And one was that Gorbachev was killed or thrown out of office by hard-line Communists. The other was that Gorbachev did actually change things but it created so much chaos and corruption that the whole country fell apart. Another one was that it kind of worked moderately well—they changed the politics and so forth, but the economy slipped away, and he would be eventually replaced by somebody else who might be able to run the country. But the point is not how well those three scenarios reflected what actually happened, but the point is that that memo indicated that that was


\(^{60}\) *Statements by and Question and Answer Session with President Bush and Chairman Gorbachev Aboard the Maxim Gorky, Marsaxlokk Harbor, Malta*, December 3, 1989, Cooper Evans Files—Cabinet Affairs, Box 3 of 6, George Bush Presidential Library. Video footage provided by the George Bush Presidential Library.
the point at which we recognized as a country, as a president, that Communism was gone or on its way and were making plans for the post-Cold War world.\textsuperscript{61}

Brent Scowcroft agreed that Malta changed the relationship between the two countries; however, he saw the affect that the meeting had on the Bush-Gorbachev relationship as being just as important:

I think the relationship between the two leaders changed. That was the most dramatic . . . that they got comfortable with each other, and from that time on . . . there was a rough patch the spring of 1990 over the Baltic states . . . but the two knew each other as individuals. They would occasionally call each other on the phone and so forth. So the personal relationship changed, and that was very beneficial.\textsuperscript{62}

At Malta, Gorbachev told Bush that he did not consider him an enemy anymore and actually wanted the United States to maintain a presence in Europe. Secretary of State Baker considered that statement to be the most important statement of the meeting because, it “showed that the relationship had moved from confrontation to cooperation.”\textsuperscript{63} And, even though no agreements were signed at Malta, the meeting was important because it built trust between the two sides, the two leaders:

There were not a lot of specifics that were accomplished there, but it was a very good trust-building meeting. And remember that I had been having meetings with Sheverdnadze before Malta at which I had become convinced that the Soviet leadership was real when they were talking about reform and when they were talking about renouncing the use of force. President Bush needed to hear that and see that and experience that himself with the head of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{64}

From Malta, Bush flew to Brussels, Belgium to speak at NATO Headquarters. It was important for Bush to brief his allies about the meeting that he had just finished with Gorbachev. He certainly did not want them to feel that they were being left out of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[61] Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.
\item[62] Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
\item[63] James A. Baker III, telephone interview by author, 22 May 2000.
\end{footnotes}
discussions that directly affected their countries. It would also be the Bush administration's first opportunity to put their spin on what was achieved at Malta. To that end, the three senior advisors that traveled with Bush to Malta all appeared on U.S. television while Bush continued to brief the Alliance. Brent Scowcroft appeared on ABC’s “Good Morning America”; James Baker gave an interview to “CNN Headline News,” and John Sununu made an appearance on “CBS Morning News.” All insisted that the Malta meeting had been a great success.\(^65\) The new understanding became even more important as the revolution that was taking place in Eastern Europe took a bloody turn. Nicolae Ceausescu, the leader of Romania who criticized Gorbachev’s reform efforts and brutally crushed dissent in his own country, was toppled by a national uprising and executed, along with his wife, on Christmas Day. It was a symbolic act that the communist domination of Eastern Europe was at an end and a reminder of how quickly incremental reforms could give way to violent change. The U.S.-Soviet relationship that was fostered by Malta would be key in insuring that reform meant political and economic progress rather than chaos and disorder. The revolutions of 1989 had begun a transformation in the geopolitical landscape that would continue to shape the future of Europe.

At the beginning of the year, President Bush had decided to make a fundamental change in the foreign policy approach he had inherited from his mentor, Ronald Reagan. By the end of 1989, he was satisfied with his choice:

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\(^{64}\) Ibid.

\(^{65}\) *Interview of Secretary of State Baker by CNN Headline News, Interview of Brent Scowcroft by ABC Good Morning America, Interview of Chief of Staff John Sununu by CBS Morning News*, NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, December 4, 1989.
I think we followed the right course from the outset, even if we had no way of anticipating what was to happen in the Soviet bloc. We had chosen to switch our focus from Moscow to Central and Eastern Europe in part to test the limits of Gorbachev’s commitment to reform, openness, and “new thinking” in foreign policy. It was fortunate that we began the Administration with this change. By concentrating on Eastern Europe and delaying engaging the Soviets on arms control, we were able to pick up immediately on the promising developments in Poland. We were in on the ground floor and could encourage and take full advantage of the wave of liberalism as it moved through the region.66

Bush, who had begun 1989 with intense criticism from the press over his long strategic review, had ended the year on a high note. The next step, however, would be perhaps more difficult. The fall of the Berlin Wall, which had symbolized the changing face of Europe, also vaulted the question of German reunification to the center of the world’s attention. It would not only test the new U.S.-Soviet relationship, it would also be a test for NATO and the leader of that alliance, George Bush.

Cooper Evans Files—Cabinet Affairs, Box 3 of 6, George Bush Presidential Library. Video footage provided by the George Bush Presidential Library. 66 Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 180.
Chapter 4
Personal Diplomacy:
The Reunification of Germany

In September 1983, Vice President Bush made a trip across North Africa and through Central Europe. Bush, as was often the case, served as President Reagan’s diplomatic surrogate. From the safety of Vienna, Bush offered a vitualistic denunciation of the Iron Curtain:

Can a wall, can guard dogs and machine guns and border patrols deny hundreds of years of European history? Can they create and enforce this fictitious division down the very center of Europe?... We [the United States] recognize no lawful division of Europe. There is much misunderstanding about the substance of the Yalta conference. Let me state as clearly as I can: There was no agreement at that time to divide Europe up into “spheres of influence.” On the contrary, the powers agreed on the principle of the common responsibilities of the three Allies for all liberated territories. The Soviet Union pledged itself to grant full independence to Poland and to all other states in Eastern Europe and to hold free elections there. The Soviet violation of these obligations is the primary root of East-West tensions today.1

More unequivocally, President Reagan made a similar point challenging Gorbachev at Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate in September 1987:

General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!2

Those words were of speechwriters, not foreign policy advisors. In practice, Reagan did not want to jeopardize his goals of nuclear arms reduction with a direct clash over

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the political division of Europe, something the Soviets had fought fiercely to protect. 
Reagan’s strong rhetoric was never matched by action. The contradiction between
Reagan’s rhetoric and his actual policies mirrored that of other western leaders who,
while feeling the obligation to support publicly German reunification in the abstract,
actually supported the status quo. As former British Prime Minister Edward Heath put
it in 1989, “Naturally we expressed our support of German reunification because we
knew it would never happen.” British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher agreed with
Heath: “although NATO had traditionally made statements supporting Germany’s
aspiration to be reunited, in practice we were rather apprehensive.” According to this
argument, the Four Powers agreement of June 5, 1945, which divided Germany, was
actually a stabilizing influence on Europe. On the evening of November 9 and early
morning of November 10, 1989, this argument lost relevance; the status quo collapsed
with the wall. This new reality created enormous problems for both the East and the
West; however, most observers still viewed reunification in terms of years, not
months. There were simply too many unsolved problems. Some feared that dramatic
changes taking place in Germany would lead to violence or possibly a new phase of
the Cold War. The problems seemed multifaceted. The German Democratic Republic
(GDR) and German Federal Republic (FRG) were two separate German states with
markedly different systems of government; Soviet and American troops occupied East
and West Germany, respectively. Many East Germans liked socialism and feared
being “second-class” citizens; West Germans condemned the shaky East German

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economy. Internationally, there was a fear of new German nationalism: Britain and France still had vivid memories of two devastating world wars. America worried that a unified Germany would abandon NATO; the Soviet Union considered East Germany the heart of the Soviet security system, an important trading partner, its most loyal ally, and its most visible “spoil of war” that continued to be an important symbol to protect against political decline. Both the East and West seemed to have more to lose than to gain by German reunification. Yet in just 10 months, the partition of Germany would end and a 45-year-old problem would be resolved. As historian Timothy Garton Ash put it, “More happened in 10 months than usually does in 10 years.” The rapid and peaceful process toward reunification was a testament to skillful leaders using behind-the-scenes personal diplomacy, plus a bit of good timing.

This process was in its embryonic state when President Bush and Chancellor Helmut Kohl talked via telephone on November 10, 1989:

Kohl: I’ve just arrived from Berlin. It is like witnessing an enormous fair. It has the atmosphere of a festival. The frontiers are absolutely open. At some points they are literally taking down the wall.... I hope they will continue to be calm and peaceful.

During the conversation, Kohl expressed concerns about East German refugees and West German financial support for the GDR. Kohl did not mention reunification; he did not have to. Both men knew that it would have to be discussed. But for now, Bush

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6 Timothy Garton Ash, In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent (New York: Random House, 1993), 343.
was content to let events take their course. He needed to wait for Soviet reaction to the
events in Berlin before he made any decisions. Focused on his upcoming meeting at
Malta with Gorbachev, now less than a month away, Bush told Kohl that they needed
to stay in contact via telephone in order to decide what to tell Gorbachev concerning
the German question. The call was remarkable. In the middle of reacting to one of the
most momentous events in German history, the German Chancellor had called to give
a report of the situation to the American President and ask his advice. Kohl told Bush
to tell the American people that “without the U.S. this day would not have been
possible.” President Bush could have used this call as the centerpiece of a dramatic
press conference now that it was clear that the wall had been permanently opened. It
certainly would help answer the criticism of his guarded press conference in the Oval
Office, during which he reacted tentatively to the initial reports of the wall’s collapse.
Instead, the report of this call appeared in a brief statement by Press Secretary Marlin
Fitzwater. As two of Bush’s NSC staff members later admitted, “This was
characteristic of Bush and his national security staff—often well reasoned on
substance but inattentive to the ceremonial dimension of the presidency.” Though
attentive to his diplomatic responsibilities, Bush ignored his duties to the American
press.

7 Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Helmut Kohl and George Bush,
10 November 1989, Telcons and Memcons—Bush/Kohl, George Bush Presidential
Library.
8 Ibid.
9 “Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the President’s Telephone Conversation
with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, November 10, 1989,” Public Papers of
10 Zelikow and Rice, Germany Unified and Europe Transformed, 105.
Bush would not have to wait long for the Soviet response. Later that evening, the White House received a cable from Gorbachev, who wanted an immediate meeting of the Four Powers to address the German situation.\textsuperscript{11} Gorbachev warned that the “chaotic situation” could have “unforeseen consequences.” President Bush recalls Gorbachev’s reaction:

The Soviet reaction to the opening of the wall was one of outright alarm…. Gorbachev sent messages to Kohl warning him to stop talking of reunification, and cabled me urging that I not overreact. He worried that the demonstrations might get out of control, with ‘unforeseen consequences,’ and he asked for understanding. This was the first time Gorbachev had clearly indicated genuine anxiety about events in Eastern Europe. Heretofore he had seemed relaxed, even blasé, about the accelerating movement in the region away from communism and Soviet control. It was as if he suddenly realized the serious implications of what was going on.\textsuperscript{12}

Bush and his advisors felt that the Four Power conference was a bad idea. But, before a response was sent to Gorbachev, it was important that the West agreed on a common approach. As the leader of the Western alliance, Bush assumed the responsibility for orchestrating the response. Scowcroft phoned Kohl’s advisor, Horst Teltschik to get his opinion. Secretary of State James Baker then called West German Foreign Minister Genscher and British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. All agreed to reject Gorbachev’s demand for a Four Power conference. Bush proposed a response that (1) ignored Gorbachev’s warnings, (2) welcomed his public support of the East German’s decision to open their borders, (3) reaffirmed the desire to maintain public order, (4) and voiced confidence that the West German government was committed to

\textsuperscript{11} Unofficial translation of Gorbachev letter to President Bush, National Security Council/Brent Scowcroft Files-9000 APNSA Chrons: Gorbachev, George Bush Presidential Library.

\textsuperscript{12} George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, \textit{A World Transformed} (New York: Knopf, 1998), 149-150.
incremental change that would not destabilize Eastern Europe. For the time being, Bush chose a passive policy, which supported self-determination but with a tone that would not further alarm the Soviets. He would not yield to Gorbachev’s insistence on Four Power intervention, nor would he jump to premature conclusions on reunification. Margaret Thatcher, François Mitterand, and Kohl agreed with the statement that Bush sent to Gorbachev on November 17, 1989. The reply would give all sides time to properly evaluate the events in Germany and crystallize their view concerning what would take place next.

The issue of German reunification was problematic. As leader of NATO, it was Bush’s responsibility to create a consensus among the members of the Alliance. His greatest challenge would be convincing Great Britain to go along with German reunification. Britain had traditionally felt that they had a “special relationship” with the United States and was the leading supporter of the U.S.-led NATO framework, which gave Britain greater authority than its economy and military strength warranted. Margaret Thatcher had been the most vocal supporter of this “special relationship” during the Reagan administration. When Bush took control of the White House, however, as Thatcher noted in her memoir, “for... partly personal chemistry and partly genuine differences of policy—that relationship had become somewhat

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strained."¹⁵ Thatcher realized something that many Americans did not: George Bush had markedly different policies than his predecessor Ronald Reagan. For her part, Thatcher preferred Reagan. She was uncomfortable with the astonishing pace of change, warning that “times of great change are times of great uncertainty, even danger.”¹⁶ Germany certainly was seen as a source of danger by Thatcher, who felt that aggression and self-doubt were an intrinsic part of Germany’s national character. Thatcher’s foreign policy was animated by an anti-German prejudice common among persons of her generation. This deep-seated feeling was evident in her remarks to one of her foreign policy advisors in 1989 while watching the collapse of the Berlin Wall:

You know, there are things that people of your generation and mine ought never to forget. We’ve been through the war and we know perfectly well what Germans are like and what dictators can do and how national character basically doesn’t change.¹⁷

Thatcher’s fears, however, were not simply based on painful memories from her youth. She was worried about how a united Germany would affect the power balance in Europe:

A reunited Germany is simply too big and powerful to be just another player within Europe.... Germany is... by its very nature a destabilizing rather than a stabilizing force in Europe.¹⁸

She worried that the reunification of Germany would undermine Gorbachev, leading to demands for border changes throughout central Europe. She was even more worried about Germany’s economic expansion. Thatcher preferred a truly democratic East Germany to formal reunification. To that end, she sent Bush a message urging that the

¹⁵ Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, 810.
¹⁶ Ibid., 360.
¹⁷ Quoted in Eric J. Evans, Thatcher and Thatcherism (London: Routledge, 1997), 104.
priority should be to see genuine democracy established in East Germany and that
"German reunification was not something to be addressed at present."19

France was also a problem for Bush. France hoped to strengthen the
Alliance via Europeanization, which encouraged European cohesion through
conventional military cooperation with the West Germans and cooperation with the
British on nuclear weapons. This framework emphasized gaining greater
independence from the hegemonic power of the United States, which certainly infused
Europeanism with an anti-American undercurrent. The Bush administration would not
give into this line of thinking. As Brent Scowcroft insisted, the United States would
continue to be a European power:

The United States intends to remain engaged in Europe with a substantial
military and political presence. We are a European power, with an abiding and
permanent interest in European security.20

Parts of France's position could be used by Bush to push for a consensus. Even though
it undercut Atlanticism (American hegemony), the goal of France was a more
independent West European power center. The source of stability for Western Europe
was threefold: NATO (defense), the European Community (economic), and the
Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (political). The source of stability
for the East was imposed from the outside—the monopoly of power by the
Communist party and the readiness of the Soviet Union to use force to maintain its
appointed leaders in power. With that system of coercion quickly crumbling, stability

18 Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, 791.
19 Ibid., 793.
20 "Speech by Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to President Bush for National Security
Affairs, Wehrkunde Conference, 3 February 1990," transcript in Europe Transformed:
in Eastern Europe, and by means of proximity, Western Europe, was in doubt. Both Thatcher and Mitterand accepted the Germans' right to self-determination, but they did not believe that the Germans had a right to upset the political realities of Europe. Bush focused on stability in Europe, noting that NATO, unlike the Warsaw Pact, provided a solid framework for cooperation in an integrated Europe. This brought protests from Thatcher who, for largely economic reasons, did not want Germany to be part of an increasingly integrated European Community. She wanted to keep both NATO and the Warsaw Pact intact in order to maintain part of the old order.

Consensus within the Alliance was not Bush's only problem in respect to German reunification. East German dissident groups were demonstrating to reform the Communist regime while keeping a separate state. In West Germany, Chancellor Kohl did not yet have a mandate for reunification because of fear that a union would disrupt the economy. An opinion poll taken the month before the fall of the Berlin Wall showed that only 56 percent of West Germans favored reunification. Given the lack of consensus inside Germany, Bush needed a plan that left domestic concerns to be worked out between the two German states. There were also fears from countries surrounding Germany, particularly Poland, that feared a unified Germany would try to alter the Helsinki Accords, which guaranteed its post-World War II borders. East and West Germany could not be disentangled from any of their international treaty and occupation status before assurances could be worked out to the satisfaction of neighboring countries. The most difficult job for Bush, however, would be convincing

Documents on the End of the Cold War, Lawrence Freedman, ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), 452-457.
the Soviets to allow a reunified Germany that remained within NATO. The Soviet position on reunification came from concern for their security arrangements. East Germany, with its approximately 370,000 Soviet troops, was the center of the Warsaw Pact. Rather than a mutual defense system, the Warsaw Pact was in essence a series of bilateral agreements between each member and the Soviet Union. If reunification resulted in a united Germany within NATO, it would mean an impossible disparity between NATO and the remainder of the Warsaw Pact.22

Before each side had a chance to develop its own policies, Chancellor Kohl surprised everyone with a speech before the Bundestag on November 28, in which he outlined a 10-point plan for German unity:

1. Establish measures to provide unhindered travel between East and West Germany.
2. Expand technological cooperation with the GDR.
3. Expand economic aid to the GDR if ‘fundamental change of the political and economic system in the GDR be agreed upon and put irrevocably into effect.’ This would require free elections without SED (Socialist Unity party) monopoly of power and the dismantling of centralized economic planning.
4. Establish a “contractual community” with the GDR to cooperate institutionally on a variety of common problems.
5. Proceed, after free elections in the GDR, to develop “confederate structures between the two German states and, eventually, a federal system for all Germany, which would include joint governmental committees and a common parliament.
6. Embed the development of inter-German relations in the pan-European process and in East-West relations.
7. Strengthen the EC (European Community), encourage European integration, and allow Eastern European countries entrance into the EC once they have met certain prerequisites.
8. Speed up development of the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe), including new institutions for East-West economic cooperation and environmental relations.

9. Support rapid progress in arms control.
10. Peacefully overcome the division of Europe and support reunification through a policy of self-determination by the German people.23

The 10-point plan was actually a modest proposal that was only meant to establish an outline for reunification, not speed up the process. What it did, however, was encourage all sides to take the issue of reunification seriously. The speech had been made without consultation with any NATO countries, something particularly upsetting to Mitterand who had met with Kohl just three days earlier. The Soviets immediately dismissed the 10-point plan as unrealistic.24 From that point on, each side suggested corrections and alternatives to Kohl’s plan. Soviet officials suggested, at various times throughout this period, the following counterproposals:

(1) The dissolution of NATO and the Warsaw Pact and their replacement by permanent all-European security structures.
(2) A European-wide referendum on the international and security aspects of German unification.
(3) The neutralization and demilitarization of Germany.
(4) A military-political status for Germany in NATO similar to that of France.
(5) Continued, though modified, exercise of four-power occupation rights in Germany.
(6) The formation of a center in Berlin to control all military forces in Germany.
(7) Membership of Germany in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.
(8) Membership of the Soviet Union in NATO.
(9) Membership of the FRG in NATO and associate status for the eastern part of Germany in the Warsaw Pact.25

The dramatic differences in these proposals demonstrate the vulnerability of the Soviet Union. Even when reunification took on the aura of inevitability, Gorbachev did not want to give the appearance of acceding to Western demands. The initiatives proposed by the various sides quickly began to fall into three broad categories: (1) a major conference that would be comprised of all CSCE members and convene to negotiate the final peace settlement of World War II, (2) a Four Powers conference to resolve what had been agreed on at Potsdam in 1945 as provisional arrangements, (3) or a German-only solution that left the FRG and the GDR to handle matters without any outside interference.26

The Bush administration developed a plan that combined the German-only approach with the Four Powers meeting demanded by the Soviets. This “Two-plus-Four” plan would give the two German states control over internal matters while allowing the Four Powers to oversee the external aspects of reunification. The plan provided a diplomatic process for carrying out rapid reunification in a way that all countries involved might accept. Most importantly, it gave Moscow a chance to participate in part of the process toward reunification as it was happening rather than after the process finished—an important point for Gorbachev, who did not want to appear as caving into Western demands. Not all of Bush’s advisors initially embraced the Two-plus-Four approach. There was disagreement between the NSC, who had reservations about the plan, and the State Department. Scowcroft did not like the idea of involving the Four Powers because he feared that the Soviet Union might end up dominating the process. There was a greater concern, however, that the FRG and

26 James A. Baker III with Thomas M. DeFrank, The Politics of Diplomacy:
Moscow might work out a private deal, as had happened in the past.\textsuperscript{27} In the end, Baker was allowed to begin negotiations on Two-plus-Four. The administration undertook an intensive campaign of personal diplomacy to convince others that the Two-plus-Four approach was best. Baker explained the plan to Hans-Dietrich Genscher who, realizing that it would give great-power legitimacy to reunification, agreed with the plan as long as the “Two” preceded the “Four.” As he indicates:

\begin{quote}
It was important to me that the two German states, the ones most concerned with unification, discuss foreign-policy aspects with the Four, rather than the other way around. Any appearance of the Four negotiating about Germany must not be allowed to arise. This consideration dictated the order in the name given the conference: Two plus four, not four plus two.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

This talk along with Bush's conversation with British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd on January 29 and Scowcroft's conversation with Kohl's assistant Horst Teltschik on February 3 meant that the Two-plus-Four plan had been explained to both the British and Germans, both of whom seemed favorably disposed. Baker traveled to Moscow to present the plan to the Soviets, stopping along the way to discuss matters with French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas. Baker met with Shevardnadze on February 7 and Gorbachev on February 9. Baker recalls that although German reunification was still “a very tough topic” as far as Shevardnadze was concerned, he felt that Gorbachev might be willing to at least consider the American proposal:

\begin{quote}
I don’t think he had a real problem with the process. I think they were interested in a treaty of peace. I think they were interested in seeing Germany
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{27} For example, the agreements of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, Rapallo in 1922, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Accord in 1939.

Baker paved the way for Gorbachev’s meeting the following day with the West Germans.

On Saturday, February 10, 1990, Chancellor Kohl and his Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher flew to Moscow to meet with Gorbachev. Kohl’s preparation for the meeting included help from the Americans. Baker had given him a summary of his discussions with Gorbachev, including Gorbachev’s concerns about a united Germany and indicating that Gorbachev might accept the Two-plus-Four plan. Baker urged Kohl to calm Soviet fears by stressing that Germany’s borders were permanent. Bush also sent Kohl a letter, pledging America’s full support and asking him to make it clear to Gorbachev that the neutralization of Germany was out of the question and that all of a united Germany would remain in NATO:

I was deeply gratified by your rejection of proposals for neutrality and your firm statement that a unified Germany would stay in the North Atlantic Alliance…. Even if, as we hope, the Soviet Union withdrawals all its troops from Eastern Europe, it will still remain far and away the most powerful single military power in Europe. U.S. troops in Germany, and elsewhere on the continent, backed by a credible deterrent, must in my view continue to help preserve the security of the West as long as our allies desire our military presence in Europe as part of the common defense. As our two countries journey together through this time of hope and promise, we can remain confident of our shared ability to defend the fruits of freedom. Nothing Mr. Gorbachev can say to Jim Baker or to you can change the fundamental fact of our deep and enduring partnership.30

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30 Excerpt of letter from Bush to Kohl can be found in Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 240-241.
Kohl was ecstatic over the letter, hailing it as “one of the great documents in German-American history.” By giving Kohl the strongest possible guarantee of American support, Bush lessened the chance that West Germany might abandon NATO in order to hasten reunification. In a phone call soon after the meeting, Kohl reassured Bush that he had made it clear to Gorbachev that neutralization was out of the question. He also relayed his belief that Gorbachev could be persuaded to agree:

Kohl: I told Gorbachev again that the neutralization of Germany is out of the question for me.

Bush: Did he acquiesce or just listen? How did he react?

Kohl: My impression is that this is a subject about which they want to negotiate, but that we can win that point in negotiations. The modalities will be important, but I do believe we can find a solution.

The historic meeting between Gorbachev and Kohl was important because Gorbachev finally accepted that German reunification would be decided by the German people. He still, however, was not ready to relinquish his right to shape the external aspects of reunification or accept a unified Germany in NATO. As Kohl told Bush in the telephone conversation, this still needed to be negotiated.

NATO and Warsaw Pact foreign ministers met in Ottawa, Canada, in February 1990 to discuss arms control matters, including Bush’s Open Skies proposal. While arms control was the official agenda, unofficial private meetings centered on Germany. Bush had sent Baker to reach agreement on Two-plus-Four. Gorbachev, meanwhile, had sent Sheverdnadze with a mandate to wrap up a CFE (conventional forces in Europe) agreement. Baker, Hurd, Dumas, and Genscher reached agreement

and decided to present the plan to the Soviets. Baker handed the Two-plus-Four announcement to Sheverdnadze, who agreed to forward it to Gorbachev. Gorbachev gave his consent, provided that it did not mention the mid-March East German elections and that the announcement promised to deal with issues of security for neighboring states. These demands were meant to placate his allies in East Germany and Poland. Baker was delighted with the agreement. Especially when Sheverdnadze informed him that Gorbachev had dropped his demand of symmetrical force levels in Europe, thus clearing the last hurdle for a CFE treaty. In Ottawa, when the joint statement on Two-plus-Four was made to the press, the NATO foreign ministers that had been left out of the ad hoc meetings were furious. They were not the only ones infuriated by the announcement. Hard-liners in Moscow were upset that Gorbachev had made this agreement before resolving the West’s demand that Germany remain in NATO. Kohl, however, was overjoyed, declaring that Germany was “jumping with a single leap” toward reunification: “We have never been so close to our goal, the unity of all Germans in freedom, as we are today.”

The Ottawa announcement was important symbolically. It demonstrated that there was a certain degree of consensus that German reunification would happen and a process was now in place to manage it. Reunification had now moved to the planning stage. There were still significant problems. As one Bush administration official noted, “the road to unification still led through Moscow.”

Despite Gorbachev’s eagerness to accommodate Baker and Kohl, the Soviet hierarchy was still not ready to accept reunification. Many officials in the

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32 Ibid.
33 Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 190.
Soviet Union and East Germany wanted to retain influence by channeling the process through a German confederation, something that would require a victory by the Communists and Social Democrats in the upcoming March elections in East Germany. According to polls, this seemed likely.\textsuperscript{35}

Helmut Kohl met with President Bush at Camp David on February 24, 1990. Bush wanted a relaxed atmosphere in which he could talk openly with Kohl (See figure 4.1). Their many phone conversations had established good rapport. Bush now wanted to capitalize on the relationship that he had so carefully fostered in order to coordinate the path to reunification, keep Germany committed to NATO, and renew German commitment to the Oder-Neisse line as its permanent eastern boundary. As for the border issue, Kohl proposed that the United States should mediate the dispute. Bush accepted Kohl’s offer, resolving the Polish-German border issue by the end of March, largely thanks to private mediation between Kohl and Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki. The NATO issue was a bit more complex. Kohl agreed that a united Germany should be a member of NATO; however, the precise definition for Germany’s NATO membership was not yet clear. Should Germany’s membership be similar to France’s and not participate in NATO’s military structures? Should there be a transition period? Should NATO forces and nuclear weapons be prevented from being stationed on East German soil? These questions had clearly not been resolved by Kohl, something that truly concerned President Bush. Bush did not want another France in NATO. He wanted Germany to remain in NATO, felt that U.S. troops and

\textsuperscript{34} Zelikow and Rice, \textit{Germany Unified and Europe Transformed}, 196.
\textsuperscript{35} Bush and Scowcroft, \textit{A World Transformed}, 245.
Figure 4.1. Bush practicing personal diplomacy during a walk with Chancellor Kohl at Camp David, February 25, 1990. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
nuclear weapons should remain in Germany, and believed that the territory of the former East Germany should have a “special military status” that would allow its integration into NATO. Bush also made it clear to Kohl that Soviet opposition to full German membership in NATO would not be tolerated:

The Soviets are not in a position to dictate Germany’s relationship with NATO. What worries me is talk that Germany must not stay in NATO. To hell with that! We prevailed, they didn’t. We can’t let the Soviets clutch victory from the jaws of defeat.  

Bush’s strong words showed that this point was not up for negotiation. Kohl suggested that the Soviets might acquiesce for the right price and that convincing the Soviets about membership might “end up as a matter of cash. They need money.” He went on to say that the trick would be to get the Soviets to tell the West the real price for agreeing to German membership in NATO. The Camp David meeting was instrumental in allowing the United States to coordinate the objectives and procedures for the upcoming Two-plus-Four negotiations. Following the Camp David meeting, the NSC staff prepared a blueprint for the talks to limit their scope. The United States circulated the following plan to its allies so that the position of the West would be clear:

- Four Power rights, including the fate of Berlin: decide in Two-plus-Four.
- Borders: decide in Two-plus-Four with sovereign German voice.
- NATO’s obligations toward the former GDR: sovereign German decision; no discussion in Two-plus-Four.
- German forces in GDR: sovereign German decision; could be discussed in Two-plus-Four.
- Soviet troops in GDR: sovereign German decision and subject for bilateral German-Soviet agreement; could be discussed in Two-plus-Four.
- Nuclear weapons in FRG: to be decided by Germany or in arms control negotiations; no discussion in Two-plus-Four.

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36 Ibid., 253.
37 Ibid., 253.
• German NATO membership: sovereign German decision; no discussion in Two-plus-Four.
• Prohibition of German nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons: sovereign German decision; could be discussed in Two-plus-Four.
• Size of the Bundeswehr: to be decided by Germany or in arms control negotiations; no discussion in Two-plus-Four.  

This plan would be used at the Two-plus-Four meetings and for future consultations with allies. It is clear by the clarity and level of detail in this list that the Bush administration was setting down the law to its allies in order to ensure Western solidarity, something on which the U.S. strategy depended. The belief that Soviet compliance was a matter of money proved important as the United States and West Germany began work on an “incentives package” for the Soviet Union. In the press conference following the Camp David meeting, the United States and West Germany appeared to be in full agreement. Bush called Thatcher, Mitterand, and Gorbachev the following day to brief them, in very general terms, what had happened. All knew that nothing could be resolved until the March 18 elections in East Germany. Most observers in the West feared that even though the Communists would probably lose, the voters would turn to the Social Democrats, making it hard for Kohl and the Christian Democrats to regain momentum.

There were two basic possibilities for reunification according to the Basic Law of West Germany. Article 146 allowed for a constitutional assembly following all-German elections to create a new political state with a new constitution and new form

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38 Original list in memorandum from Zelikow through Blackwill to Scowcroft and Gates on 12 March 1990, “The Two Plus Four Agenda,” National Security Council Files, George Bush Presidential Library. A summary of this memorandum can be found in Zelikow and Rice, Germany Unified and Europe Transformed, 227.
of government. The Soviets hoped that the result would be a weak confederation. The
other lawful possibility was for East Germany to dissolve and be absorbed through a
direct takeover by West Germany under Article 23, thus creating a larger, more
powerful FRG with its current system of government intact. Led by Kohl, the official
West German position favored using Article 23. East Germans would have their
chance to voice their opinion when the first free general elections in the GDR were
held on March 18, 1990. With an amazing 93 percent voter turnout, the Alliance for
Germany garnered more than 48 percent of the vote; the Social Democrats (SPD)
received 22 percent; the ex-Communists, the Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS),
received 16 percent of the vote.40 It was a decisive vote for the absorption of East
Germany into the more prosperous West: over 75 percent of the vote went to parties
promoting reunification. It was a mandate for Kohl’s plan for unity. The new East
German government was dedicated to a rapid West German takeover under article 23,
giving Kohl complete control of internal unification. President Bush phoned Kohl to
congratulate him on a stunning victory, exclaiming, “You’re a hell of a campaigner!”41
Having already begun discussions with the SPD-East leader Böhme in anticipation of
victory, the election caught the Soviets by surprise. As a result, the Soviet position
became weaker after the elections.

39 A record of these telephone calls can be found in the Presidential Telcons Notebook
(January-June 1990), National Security Council Files, George Bush Presidential
Library.
40 “Results of the Parliamentary Elections in East Germany, 18 March 1990,” Uniting
Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944-1993, Konrad H. Jarausch and Volker
Gransow, eds., translated by Allison Brown and Belinda Cooper (Providence, R.I.:
41 Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between Bush and Kohl, March 20, 1990,
Telcons and Memcons- Bush/Kohl, George Bush Presidential Library.
While Kohl continued handling the internal aspects of reunification, it was up to the United States, as Baker recalls, to address the major task of leading a fundamental change in NATO and the CSCE:

A unified Germany would alter the fundamental geo-strategic, political, and economic architecture of Europe. That meant that NATO had to become a more political institution, CSCE had to be strengthened, and a clear and complementary division of responsibilities among these institutions and the European Community would have to be defined.42

Resolving German reunification meant taking a fresh look at European security as a whole. Secretary Baker had mapped out his plan for a new European architecture in December 1989. Now, the position of the United States needed to go even further. A fundamental change in NATO’s strategy would have to be made if it were to incorporate a unified Germany without angering the Soviets. It was necessary to convince the Soviet Union that Europe’s political and security institutions were evolving. The Soviet Union needed to feel unthreatened by a NATO strengthened by the addition of a unified Germany. After all, the Soviet Union still had 350,000 troops stationed in the GDR and had the legal right to refuse to give up their Four Power rights and remain a military presence in Germany. The best approach for the United States was to convince them that such an action would isolate them diplomatically. As Bush’s advisors believed:

It must at least be clear that the costs of continued rigidity would be a deterioration in the smooth, stable relations so essential to the benign international environment in which the Soviet leaders could concentrate on domestic reform.43

43 Zelikow and Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*, 246.
In order to achieve this level of isolation, there had to be complete solidarity on the part of the West. Now that the German election made it clear that unity could not be halted, Mitterand and Thatcher began to play a more constructive role. Bush met with Thatcher in Bermuda and Mitterand in Key Largo, Florida, to discuss the goals of the upcoming Two-plus-Four conference. Bush sent letters after these meetings and his meetings with Kohl to reiterate what had been agreed upon so that the Western position on NATO and Two-plus-Four was clear. He would then make statements to the press to provide public repetition of the agreements, speaking as the official voice of a solidified West, thus locking up debate. Bush dramatically improved the solidarity of the West’s position by the end of April. The first meeting of the Ottawa Group was held in Bonn on May 5, 1990. The day before, Bush spoke on the future of NATO at a commencement address at Oklahoma State University, once again using a low-profile media event to make an important policy speech. Bush had previewed his ideas to NATO leaders in the days leading up to his speech, meeting with Thatcher, Mitterand, and Kohl, and talking via telephone to NATO Secretary General Woerner. As with previous dealings with NATO leaders, Bush wanted to make sure everyone was on the same page—his. Bush proposed an early NATO summit to review NATO’s political role in Europe, review its strategy in conventional defenses and nuclear weapons, and establish a consensus on the future of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). This “wide-ranging NATO strategy review for the transformed Europe of the 1990s” was meant most of all to signal to Gorbachev that NATO was changing and would not be a threat:
As military threats fade, the political dimension of NATO’s work—always there but seldom noticed—becomes prominent...our enemy today is uncertainty and instability....we must plan for a different kind of military presence focused less on the danger of an immediate outbreak of war.44

In the same speech, however, he also sent a message that Germany would remain a part of NATO:

And we should reaffirm the importance of keeping a united Germany as a full member of NATO.45

Bush made it clear that the West was committed to changing NATO’s traditional role, which had been one of defense against a massive Soviet attack on Western Europe, and re-inventing it as a political alliance. This idea built on a speech Secretary Baker made before the Berlin Press Club the previous December in which he called for a “new architecture” for a new era:

As we construct a new security architecture that maintains the common defense, the non-military component of European security will grow. Arms control agreements, confidence-building measures and other political consultative arrangements are going to become more important. It is in such a world that the role of NATO is going to evolve. NATO will become the forum where the Western nations cooperate to negotiate, to verify and to extend agreements between East and West.46

NATO had to adapt to a new role if the United States was to stay in Europe.

Gorbachev had suggested doing away with NATO and the Warsaw Pact in favor of other European alliances. Bush had to demonstrate that NATO, the EC, and CSCE were complementary, not competitive. To further that goal, the Bush team put together

45 Ibid.
a proposal that would, as Brent Scowcroft put it, “help Moscow save face,” and transform the alliance in four areas:

1. It would emphasize its political mission and develop cooperation and partnership with former adversaries. The alliance pledged never to be the first to use force, proposed a non-aggression pact with members of the Warsaw Pact (not with the Pact itself), and invited those governments to establish diplomatic missions at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

2. It called for changing the character of conventional defense by moving away from “forward defense” and relying increasingly on more mobile, truly multinational forces. The document also proposed conventional arms control negotiations (after the conclusion of a CFE treaty) to further limit offensive military manpower in Europe.

3. It announced a new NATO nuclear strategy, modifying “flexible response” to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons and make them “truly weapons of last resort.”

4. It proposed strengthening the CSCE process by giving it a new mandate to promote democratic institutions, operational capacity in the area of conflict prevention, and, for the first time, an institutional structure through a new secretariat and other bodies.  

These proposals would be made at the NATO summit to help resolve the obstacles to Soviet acceptance of German reunification within NATO.

Persuading Gorbachev to give his approval for German membership in NATO, however, would require more than just a change in NATO. Kohl urged Bush to agree to Gorbachev’s request for financial assistance. But Bush could not give Gorbachev the $20 billion for which he had asked, not while the Soviets were still blockading Lithuania and not until Gorbachev made economic reforms to demonstrate that the money would not be wasted. What the United States actually offered was the image of a deal being struck between the two superpowers. Gorbachev desperately needed this image, even if the economic assistance came from a different source. The Bush

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administration planned a Washington summit at which they would shower Gorbachev with attention. Gorbachev arrived on May 31, 1990, and was greeted with a parade of soldiers wearing ceremonial Revolutionary War uniforms of the Old Guard from Fort Meyer. Gorbachev and Bush reviewed the fife and drum corps on the South Lawn of the White House against the backdrop of the Washington Monument before moving into the Oval Office for a private meeting at which Gorbachev hinted at financial help.

Bush planned the type of summit that Gorbachev needed to boost his image. Unlike Malta, the Washington summit was full of ceremonial events, where Gorbachev mingled with prominent business leaders, intellectuals, and celebrities. By the end of the summit, Gorbachev would receive various honors, including the *FDR for Freedoms Medal* from the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Institute, the Peace Prize from the Albert Einstein Peace Prize Foundation, and the Martin Luther King, Jr., Nonviolent Peace Prize. The first day concluded with a formal State Dinner honoring President and Mrs. Gorbachev. The dinner had a long and varied guest list ranging from political leaders, such as Henry Kissinger and Richard Gephardt, to movie stars, such as Morgan Freeman and Jessica Tandy.48 In his toast Bush laid it on thick:

> Mr. President, you deserve great credit for the course you’ve chosen—for the political and economic reforms you’ve introduced—and for creating within the Soviet Union a commitment to change. As I said this morning as I welcomed you to the White House, we want to see perestroika succeed—we want to see this transition now underway in the Soviet Union maintain its momentum.49

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47 Summary of proposals found in Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 293.
48 Detailed information concerning the Washington summit can be found in White House Press Office: Fitzwater’s Files, Subject File: USSR-US/USSR Summit 5/30/90-6/03/90, George Bush Presidential Library.
Of course, this type of praise and effort by the Bush administration to boost Gorbachev’s image was not meant as a one-way gesture. Bush hoped Gorbachev would move slowly to embrace NATO membership for Germany. At 4:30 the next afternoon, both sides crowded into the Cabinet Room to discuss Germany. At first, Gorbachev seemed unwilling to soften his position on NATO membership for a united Germany. Bush had tried all the standard arguments, but to no avail. Then, as Bush recalls, he tried something else:

I tried a new track. I reminded Gorbachev that the Helsinki Final Act stated that all countries had the right to choose their alliances. To me, that meant Germany should be able to decide for itself what it wanted. Did he agree? To my astonishment, Gorbachev shrugged his shoulders and said yes, that was correct. The room suddenly became quiet. Akhromeyev and Valentin Falin looked at each other and squirmed in their seats.50

Amazingly, the leader of the Soviet Union had, on his own and without consulting his advisors, now conceded that German membership in NATO was a matter for the Germans to decide. Knowing that Kohl had already publicly stated that Germany wanted to join NATO, Gorbachev had just given Germany the right to make that decision without having to gain approval from the Four Powers. The American side almost could not believe what they had heard:

Bob Blackwill slipped me a note asking whether I thought I could get Gorbachev to say that again. I nodded to him. ‘I’m gratified that you and I seem to agree that nations can choose their own alliances,’ I said. ‘Do you and I agree that a united Germany had the right to be non-aligned, or a member of NATO, in a final document?’ asked Gorbachev. ‘I agree with that, but the German public wants to be in NATO,’ I replied. ‘But if they want out of NATO, we will respect that. They are a democracy.’ ‘I agree to say so publicly, that the United States and the USSR are in favor of seeing a united

50 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 282.
Germany, with a final settlement leaving it up to where a united Germany can choose,' said Gorbachev.51

Gorbachev's concession angered his own side:

By this time, the dismay in the Soviet team was palpable. Akhromeyev's eyes flashed angrily as he gestured to Falin. They snapped back and forth in loud stage whispers in an agitated debate as Gorbachev spoke. It was an unbelievable scene, the likes of which none of us had ever seen before—virtually open rebellion against a Soviet leader.52

Despite this opposition, Gorbachev refused to recant his concession to Bush's major point. He suggested that the foreign ministers work out the details. Shevardnadze refused, saying that it was a matter for the presidents to decide. The Americans had managed to get a major concession from the Soviet leader and were not about to let him forget his pledge (See figure 4.2).

The rest of the summit went as planned, with discussions of other pressing matters. There were no further discussions of Germany between Bush and Gorbachev during the summit. Instead, Gorbachev pressed for a trade agreement that included Most Favored Nation (MFN) status. He almost seemed agitated at times, desperate to go home with some tangible accomplishment from the summit. Considering Gorbachev's newfound flexibility on Germany, the Bush administration was inclined to accommodate him. The only problem was the situation in Lithuania. The trade agreement would have both a public side and a private one. The United States would sign the grain and trade agreements but would not send the package to Congress until the Soviets passed legislation on emigration, something that had been a precondition for MFN status. The package would also not be sent for congressional approval until

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 282-283.
Figure 4.2. Bush and Gorbachev in the Cabinet Room during the Washington Summit on May 31, 1990. By the end of this meeting, Gorbachev had conceded that NATO membership was a matter for the Germans to decide. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
the Soviets lifted the economic embargo on Lithuania and began negotiations. With those stipulations, the trade agreement was signed and Gorbachev had a tangible accomplishment to take back with him to bolster his support at home. Gorbachev's accomplishment came at considerable public expense for President Bush. Unaware of the secret conditions behind the agreement, the press attacked Bush for abandoning Lithuania. The next day the two men traveled to Camp David for more relaxed discussions (See figure 4.3). Bush had gotten Gorbachev to be flexible on German membership in NATO, and Gorbachev had gotten his trade agreement to help his struggling domestic economy. At the press conference at the end of the summit, Bush sought to get Gorbachev's pledge on record (See figure 4.4):

On the matter of Germany’s external alliances, I believe, as do Chancellor Kohl and members of the Alliance, that the united Germany should be a full member of NATO. President Gorbachev, frankly, does not hold that view. But we are in full agreement that the matter of Alliance membership is, in accordance with the Helsinki Final Act, a matter for the Germans to decide. The statement had been cleared with the Soviets. From that point on, Gorbachev never publicly opposed the idea that alliance membership was a matter for the Germans to decide. The Washington summit had been a success. In Copenhagen on June 5, Shevardnadze met with Baker during a session of the CSCE and told him that the Soviet Union would accept a unified Germany in NATO and that the unification process could be completed by the end of 1990. This offer, of course, would be dependant on the United States following through with the assurance that had been

Figure 4.3. Informal discussions at Camp David, June 2, 1990. *Around the table clockwise:* Bush, Quayle, Scowcroft, Shevardnadze, Gorbachev, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, Peter Afanasenko (interpreter), and Baker. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
Figure 4.4. Gorbachev and Bush sign agreements reached at the Washington summit. June 1, 1990. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
promised in the nine-point plan.\textsuperscript{54} Baker marched over to Genscher’s hotel to get him out of bed to tell him the good news.\textsuperscript{55} Gorbachev made it official the following week on June 12 when he publicly announced from Moscow that he would accept a unified Germany as a member of NATO if certain conditions were met. In an amazingly short time span, the Soviet position had moved from an adamant “no” to a “yes, but.”

Bush sought to eliminate Gorbachev’s remaining reservations at the NATO Summit in London on July 4. Despite some objections by Thatcher and Mitterand concerning some of the language used in his proposals, Bush was largely able to push through his plan for a new NATO structure. On his flight from London to the G-7 summit in Houston, Bush sent Gorbachev a personal message transmitted from \textit{Air Force One} that described how the NATO declaration addressed Soviet concerns:

> Working solely from a draft text I circulated to my NATO counterparts, we a few hours ago issued a declaration that promises the Alliance’s transformation in every aspect of its work and especially of its relationship with the Soviet Union. As you read the NATO declaration, I want you to know that it was written with you importantly in mind, and I made the point strongly to my colleagues in London.... I hope today’s NATO declaration will persuade you that NATO can and will serve the security interests of Europe as a whole.\textsuperscript{56}

At the G-7 meeting, Bush sought to address Gorbachev’s remaining condition: economic assistance. Unfortunately, the international consensus that had helped push through the London declaration did not exist when it came to large-scale aid. Instead, over the objections of Kohl, the leaders asked the International Monetary Fund to start a year-long review of the economic needs of the Soviet Union. Direct assistance would have to wait...or come solely from the Germans. That is exactly what

\textsuperscript{54} Beschloss and Talbott, \textit{At the Highest Levels}, 230.
\textsuperscript{55} Baker with DeFrank, \textit{The Politics of Diplomacy}, 255.
\textsuperscript{56} Bush and Scowcroft, \textit{A World Transformed}, 295.
happened. Kohl and Gorbachev met on July 14 in the Caucasus at Gorbachev’s home. Kohl agreed to assume all GDR economic obligations to Moscow, arrange a credit of DM 5 billion ($3 billion), and pay the costs of Soviet troops in East Germany during the transition period. Finally, Gorbachev was ready to agree to German unification within NATO without conditions or reservations.\textsuperscript{57} As Margaret Thatcher cynically assessed, “The Soviets were prepared to sell reunification for a modest boost from Germany to their crumbling economy.”\textsuperscript{58} Although the final concession was monetary, the Washington summit and NATO declaration had allowed Gorbachev to accept the final terms without, at least in his mind, appearing to concede to Western ultimatums. No matter when or why he decided to concede to the American position, Gorbachev knew that he had to sell German NATO membership to the Soviet people. He would soon find out how good a salesman he had been.

The reunification process went smoothly after the Gorbachev/Kohl Caucasus meeting with the Two-plus-Four talks producing a final document that detailed the international conditions of German reunification. The \textit{Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany} was signed with little fanfare on September 12, 1990.\textsuperscript{59} There was little reason for celebration. The true accomplishment had not come during the Two-plus-four talks, where negotiators quibbled over minutiae. It had come months earlier during the private meetings, letters, and phone conversations between leaders from both the East and the West. It was during those moments that personal

\textsuperscript{58} Thatcher, \textit{The Downing Street Years}, 792.
diplomacy proved to be decisive. The United States in particular used personal diplomacy to achieve what had once been unthinkable. Convincing the Soviet Union to allow a unified Germany to remain in NATO was an important foreign policy achievement for the Bush administration. As Secretary Baker recalls, the Bush administration “took advantage of a very narrow window of opportunity.”\textsuperscript{60} The first step was to unite Western leaders. Bush accomplished this through extensive meetings, letters, and telephone conversations with Western leaders. As Baker recalls:

> Personal Diplomacy was very important. I think President Bush believes in it. I certainly believe in it, and personal diplomacy to me does not mean that you put personal relationships ahead of principle or ahead of your party’s or country’s interests. It just means that if you can trust a person on the other side of the table, you have a better chance at getting things done.\textsuperscript{61}

This was particularly important in relations with Helmut Kohl. Bush had to make sure that the Germans would remain in NATO. Bush ensured Kohl’s partnership by offering him full support for his plan for German reunification as long as it was understood that the end result would be a unified Germany inside NATO. As Scowcroft recalls, the Bush-Kohl meeting after Malta was the turning point in their partnership:

> It was pivotal because Kohl was sort of out on his own, both inside Germany. .. Genscher, they had a free democratic party, was worried about moving too fast and wanted a different kind of relationship between East and West Germany. The other allies didn’t want German unification, so Kohl was kind of feeling his way. And they had this meeting and the president said that, you know, “I’m not worried. I like your ideas. You go ahead; I’ll back you. I’ll

\textsuperscript{59} “Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, 12 September 1990,” \textit{Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944-1993}, Jarausch and Gransow, eds., translated by Brown and Cooper, 204-208.\textsuperscript{60} \textsuperscript{60} James A. Baker III, telephone interview by author, 22 May 2000.\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
keep everybody else off your back.” So he gave, in essence, a blank check to Kohl to move ahead. And from then on it was a pretty steady course.\(^\text{62}\)

After that meeting it was a pretty steady course as far as Western solidarity was concerned. But getting the Soviets to accept what had been difficult even for some Western leaders to accept would prove much more difficult. America’s strategy depended on Western solidarity and Soviet unwillingness, or inability, to take decisive action. Just as having a clear plan of attack was key for the West, disagreements within the Soviet hierarchy weakened their resolve. The Bush administration needed to hold firm in their demands, try to diplomatically isolate the Soviet Union, and hope for a crack in the Soviet position. Getting a defeated Soviet Union to accept an abrupt realignment of the European power balance would require the Bush administration to wait for an opening. That narrow window of opportunity was created when Gorbachev simply could not provide an acceptable alternative to the position taken by the United States. Scowcroft describes Gorbachev’s dilemma:

There were two problems. First of all, there was the problem of unification itself. And that is that East Germany was the crown jewel of the Soviet bloc. That was the major achievement, if you will, out of World War II. And so it was difficult to say, “Yes, we [the Soviet Union] failed there.” And secondly, it was the heart of the Warsaw Pact. It’s pretty hard to have a viable Warsaw Pact if East Germany is not in it. So that was the problem with unification. Then there was an added problem: suppose you let Germany unify—What do you do about membership in NATO? Because East Germany was in Warsaw Pact. West Germany was in NATO. And that was a very hard pill for Gorbachev to swallow. And in the end I think that he swallowed it only because he didn’t have a better alternative. He toyed around with the idea of a neutral Germany, but I think he decided that that would be more dangerous—to have a neutral Germany loose in Europe, than one tied down by the United States.\(^\text{63}\)

\(^{62}\) Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.

\(^{63}\) Ibid.
Not having an acceptable solution of his own, facing increasing domestic problems, and desperately needing foreign financial assistance, Gorbachev broke with the hard-liners and acquiesced at the Washington summit to allow a unified Germany to remain in NATO. These same hard-liners blamed him for losing Eastern Europe and weakening the Soviet Union.
Although the Bush administration was preoccupied with the Persian Gulf War during
the latter part of 1990 and the first part of 1991, the new relationship between the
United States and the Soviet Union was becoming increasingly evident. When Iraq
invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, James Baker and Edward Shevardnadze met to
discuss the situation. The following day, August 3, Baker and Shevardnadze signed a
joint statement condemning the Iraqi invasion that, at least to Baker, made it clear that
the Cold War was over:

Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and Iraq was a big Soviet client state. And I
flew back, I happened to be in Mongolia at the time, I flew back through
Moscow. And Shevardnadze, without clearing it with Gorbachev, joined with
me in a statement condemning the invasion and calling for an arms embargo of
Iraq. Now that was historic. The first time ever that the Soviet Union foreign
minister and the Secretary of State of the United States would ever have a joint
press conference condemning the action of a Soviet client state. That’s the day,
at least to me, it was quite clear, if it wasn’t clear the day the wall fell, it was
certainly clear that day that the Cold War was over. But that’s the kind of
coopération we were able to achieve from them. I mean nobody could conceive
of that happening.¹

Later, on November 29, 1990, the United Nations, with Soviet support, would
authorize “all necessary means” to compel compliance with UN resolutions on
Kuwait. This, basically, allowed military intervention by the UN forces to end Iraqi
aggression against Kuwait. Wanting to illustrate the new U.S.-Soviet relationship,
Baker called for actual Soviet participation in the multinational force. Baker’s
suggestion was not widely embraced on the American side. Bureaucrats within

¹ Permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Baker's own command at the State Department argued that sanctioning a Soviet military presence in the Persian Gulf directly contradicted more than 40 years of American diplomacy designed to keep the Soviets out of the region. According to both James Baker and Brent Scowcroft, President Bush, Colin Powell, Dick Cheney, and Scowcroft, also expressed initial misgivings. Baker recalls that "Powell was especially worried about giving the Soviets a role in a possible attack on Iraq in the Future."² Powell disputes Baker's claim, adding, "I certainly don't remember any particular conversations."³ What was more important to Powell was the fact that the United States had the support of the Soviet Union where it really was needed—during votes at the United Nations where a solid bloc of support was needed to pass resolutions against Iraq. Regardless of which view is accurate, there is no denying that Soviet participation in the Persian Gulf War, whether direct or indirect, was an event unthinkable during the Cold War. The coordination of superpower positions on the Gulf crisis showed a level of cooperation that demonstrated just how far the relationship between the two countries had progressed. That does not mean that there was complete unanimity throughout the crisis. But disagreements were worked out in meetings that simply would not have taken place during the Cold War. The Soviets did end up playing a role in the coalition effort, albeit a small one. They sent a few ships to join the international flotilla and monitor the blockade but did not participate in the coalition ground forces. Although their help was not needed, their support was essential. According to U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jack F. Matlock, Jr.,

1 James A. Baker III, telephone interview by author, 22 May 2000.
Soviet support of the United States during the Gulf War was “the final nail in the coffin” in terms of the Cold War rivalry.4

During the course of negotiations with the Soviets over their support for the UN resolutions that would allow the use of force, Secretary Baker had successfully lobbied Saudi Arabia to extend a $4 billion line of credit to the Soviets to help them during their transition into a market economy. It was, Baker insists, instrumental in maintaining the Soviet’s support for coalition efforts.5 It also demonstrated the growing crisis in the Soviet Union. Originally brought to power in 1985, in part because of dissatisfaction with the faltering Soviet economy, Gorbachev had orchestrated a revolution in Soviet economic thinking. However, surprisingly little progress was made in reshaping the Soviet economy. A 1990 State Department evaluation concluded that:

Despite all the rhetoric about economic reform, the Soviet economy still operates in much the same way it did when Gorbachev came to power. Enterprise decisions on production, prices, investment, wages, supplies and product mix are still constrained by central planners; innovators have no incentive to innovate, nor workers to work.6

According to this report, the old central planning system had been disrupted by ballooning deficits, inconsistent reform measures, labor unrest, and national conflicts.

No new framework had been utilized to replace the crumbling system.

Consequently, the economy slowly deteriorated between 1985 and 1988; more

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1 Colin Powell, telephone interview by author, 7 August 2000.  
noticeably in 1989. In 1990, the GNP declined by 7-9 percent; 1991 looked to be even worse. Under Gorbachev's perestroika, wages and government budget deficits rose significantly faster than production. This, in turn, caused a “ruble overhang” that led to an explosion of shortages, rationing, and inflation. The resulting deterioration in living conditions sharpened social and ethnic conflicts throughout the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev responded to the growing economic crisis with a “radicalization of rhetoric,” assuming the “executive” presidency and announcing a move to a “full-blooded” market. Unfortunately, this rhetoric was not followed by real economic reform programs such as monetary stabilization, the creation of property rights and incentives, microeconomic reform to create enterprise competition, and the creation of a safety net based on income subsidies rather than price subsidies. The report concluded that Gorbachev had been able to survive primarily because no other credible leader had emerged.\(^7\) As Ambassador Matlock concluded:

> Public confidence had plummeted just as the public was being allowed to express its views. Nationalism found sustenance in nutrients thrown off by the centrally controlled economy. Economic reform had been bungled—or rather had not been seriously attempted—and the stumbling economy was causing growing distress.\(^8\)

Even Gorbachev admitted in his memoirs that “Perestroika did not give the people prosperity, something they expected of me, as head of state, based on an ingrained, traditional feeling of dependence.”\(^9\) If the economic crisis was not addressed, the people would eventually find a new leader upon which to depend.

\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^8\) Jack F. Matlock, Jr., Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador’s Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union (New York: Random House, 1995), 293.
\(^9\) Mikhail Gorbachev, Memoirs: Mikhail Gorbachev (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 673.
Gorbachev's domestic difficulties were complicated by his policies in regard to foreign affairs, which opened the door for the democratization of Eastern Europe, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the stand down of Soviet forces, and German reunification. First, Gorbachev's concessions to the West angered hard-liners in Moscow that increasingly began to view Gorbachev as a traitor, blaming him personally for the country's problems. At a meeting with Gorbachev in November of 1990, more than a thousand military officers openly expressed their dissatisfaction with Gorbachev's leadership. Gorbachev was shaken by this meeting, fearing a military coup. Second, the events in Eastern Europe both directly and indirectly promoted separatist tendencies within the Soviet Union. The doctrine of self-determination, which Gorbachev promoted in Eastern Europe, was used by Latvians, Lithuanians, and others calling for secession. Gorbachev's goals of decentralization and democratization directly worked against his desire to preserve the Soviet Union's political and territorial integrity. Finally, Gorbachev had to worry about maintaining his political authority. Boris Yeltsin was growing increasingly popular. A poll in the Soviet Union at the end of 1990 to select the "Man of the Year" showed that 32 percent supported Yeltsin; only 19 percent backed Gorbachev. This was a dramatic change from the end of 1989 when 46 percent had supported Gorbachev and only 6 percent Yeltsin. It was becoming increasingly apparent that Yeltsin could appeal to

11 Matlock, Autopsy on an Empire, 422-423.
13 Matlock, Autopsy on an Empire, 447. Polls conducted by Yuri Levada's All-Union Public Opinion Center.
the reformers who felt let down by Gorbachev. Gorbachev’s approval rating also plummeted, dropping from 52 percent in December 1989, to 44 percent by January 1990, to 39 percent by May, to 28 percent by July, and to 21 percent by October. Gorbachev made a sharp turn to the right politically in an effort to protect against public and political opposition from Yeltsin and his allies on the left. This angered Shevardnadze who, already under intense criticism for his decision to join the Americans in support of the Gulf War, resigned on December 20, 1990, delivering a scathing speech:

Democrats, I will put it bluntly: comrade democrats, in the widest meaning of this word, you have scattered. The reformers have gone to seed. Dictatorship is coming; I state this with complete responsibility. No one knows what kind of dictatorship this will be and who will come—what kind of dictator—and what the regime will be like. I want to make the following statement: I am resigning. Let this be—and do not respond, do not curse me—let this be my contribution, if you like, my protest against the onset of dictatorship.

The move stunned Gorbachev, whom Shevardnadze had not consulted before making his surprise announcement in the Congress of People’s Deputies. Gorbachev stood and blasted the idea that a coup was possible or that there was an approaching dictatorship, charging that Shevardnadze was deserting him at his most difficult time. Certainly, it was a sign that Gorbachev’s problems would only get worse.

The U.S. Viewpoint

General Colin Powell made a trip to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1991. Arriving on July 22, Powell met with his Soviet counterpart, Mikhail Moiseyev, and was, in his words:

\[\text{14 Ibid.}\]
...dragged through Red Army showcase exercises, paratrooper operations so choreographed that they resembled skydiving ballets; tours of mess halls where my guides would have you believe the Soviet chief quartermaster was Escoffier; inspections of fighter aircraft, T-80 tanks, and AK-47 rifles until I was ready to scream.16

But, as Powell recalls, behind the facade the rot was evident. The Soviet leaders would only let him see the elite troops that they were putting on display to impress him. They denied his requests to see how the Soviet troops who had been pulled out of Eastern Europe were living and denied his requests to talk with ordinary Russians. President Bush, who was scheduled to arrive in the Soviet Union shortly after the general, asked for a report. The resulting observations depicted a military in serious decline and, with it, a deep dissatisfaction in the upper reaches of the Soviet military:

After traveling across the Soviet Union and talking to a lot of their generals, many of whom just didn’t understand the reality of the situation they were in...I still remember lecturing a bunch of Soviet generals at the General Staff Academy, and afterwards when I was through, my colleague, my counterpart General Moiseyev and all the others just leaping up and not really facing the realities. I said, ‘You guys, you’re going to have to cut back sharply; you’re probably going to have to go to a volunteer force,’ and they just kept dismissing it. And so there was a lack of reality to the situation they were in. I also could sense a deep, deep uncertainty and discomfort among the senior ranks of the Soviet military leaders. They were also very troubled over what they saw in Desert Storm and in what they saw in terms of the sophistication of the West and what we could do, and we were no longer that weak sistered, soft, not terribly competent military that they might have been counting on. And finally, I just saw generation after generation of Soviet weaponry abandoned in airfields. Every time they brought in a new generation of equipment, they just left the other generations laying around. And I could see the Red Army was essentially bankrupting the country, and it could not continue; it was not sustainable.17

17 Colin Powell, telephone interview by author, 7 August 2000.
The problems were not merely with the Soviet military. As Colin Powell recalls, the problems in the Soviet Union had taken their toll on its political leader as well:

The Mikhail Gorbachev whom I met on this trip was not the supremely confident figure of earlier summits. He seemed beaten down by the incessant battering he was taking in this convulsed country [the Soviet Union].

When President Bush arrived in Moscow the following week, he found Gorbachev in better spirits (See figure 5.1):

I saw Gorbachev late in the morning in Saint Catherine Hall. . . . Gorbachev was marvelous, and how he could stand up to all the pressures against him I simply did not know. At first I thought he still believed that there would be some windfall of Western money that would help bail out the Soviet economy—he seemed confident as he spoke—but it was soon clear that he was pragmatic and resigned to the fact that he would not get funds.

The fact is that by 1991 Gorbachev was more comfortable talking to President Bush than he was most officials in the Soviet Union. Despite the very tenuous beginning to their relationship during “the pause,” Bush and Gorbachev became genuinely friendly after Malta. During the spring and summer of 1991, Bush and Gorbachev spoke on the telephone almost every week (See figure 5.2). Yet, Bush could not give Gorbachev what he really needed—economic aid. The Bush administration’s reluctance to provide economic aid to the Soviet Union would fall under heavy criticism, some of the most pointed of which coming from the U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union:

I think at first, in ’89, there was a fear, particularly on Baker’s part, that the Soviets would simply get into the international financial and other organizations as trouble makers, as spoilers, and he didn’t want to let them in. And it was true that many of these organizations were setup for market economies, and they [the Soviet Union] did not have a market economy. But I think that’s also a reflection of the fact that Baker hadn’t quite grasped that the

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20 Based on Telcon and Memcon records, Bush Presidential Library.
Figure 5.1. Gorbachev takes Bush on a tour of Moscow on July 30, 1991. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
Figure 5.2. Bush talking via telephone to Gorbachev, January 11, 1991. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
Cold War really was over and they were looking for advice and help on how to become a capitalist society, though they didn’t want to use that word. And I think they were very slow in grasping that. I knew that he [Bush] would want something new, and I thought that given his background in business and whatnot, to make economic cooperation to bring the Soviet Union into the world economy and to create a market economy there could be, you might say, the watchword for the Bush administration. So I was trying to give him something new. But I think they [the Bush administration] didn’t really grasp the potential until too late.21

The Bush administration did start to address the problem of economic aid to the Soviet Union in the fall of 1990 when Gorbachev’s support of U.S. actions against Iraq prompted the Bush administration to be more inclined to help. Bush sent Secretary of Commerce Robert Mosbacher with a group of top executives to the Soviet Union to suggest investment and trade possibilities. The trip demonstrated to Gorbachev the benefits that could come from continued Soviet cooperation with the United States during Security Council votes on Iraq. But, as far as producing any real help to the Soviet economy, the trip did little good because, as Matlock explains:

[The trip] was without any strategy and without any real briefing about what we wanted to encourage. They hadn’t really given any thought to that, and whereas Gorbachev never came up with something worthy of support, at the same time we never gave him any coherent advice either. And the time to give him that advice was ’89, and ’90 at the very latest. By 1991 it was too late—things had fallen apart too much. But there could have been a lot more direct support for the reformers there if we’d have gotten involved earlier.22

Bush did not get involved in helping the Soviet economy early on in his administration and refused to offer large-scale aid, citing ballooning budget deficits in the United States. Matlock takes issue with that excuse:

I think they could have found the money if they wanted to. Obviously this made it more difficult that there were budget deficits. But I think they could have, and that is what Thatcher, in effect, when she was no longer Prime

21 Jack F. Matlock, Jr., interview by author, Boston, Massachusetts, 6 January 2001.
22 Ibid.
Minister... was pressing them to do: You know, George, we need to do it and you don’t have to do it all. But, you know, press the Germans. And, by the way, Major was willing to give very substantial support in January and February ’92 after the Soviet Union collapsed. It was no longer Gorbachev, and it was Bush who turned it down.23

Certainly, Bush quickly found money in his budget to finance the Persian Gulf War. In that case, Bush told the American people that even though they were experiencing financial difficulties at home, the stakes in Kuwait were too great to sit idly by and let aggression stand. When it came to the Soviet Union, however, he treated it more like a corporation evaluating a large-scale investment and deciding not to take a risk.

The Coup Attempt

The Bush administration had always been worried about a coup attempt by the hard-liners in Moscow. In fact, one of the reasons that the Bush administration had been slow in embracing Gorbachev had been their uncertainty over whether or not he would be able to maintain power or, in the event of a coup, whether or not his reforms would prove to be merely temporary and reversible, with a new government relapsing into earlier policies. There had been rumors of a coup attempt in July of 1991. Bush had even warned Gorbachev through a message sent through Ambassador Matlock. But Gorbachev had dismissed the rumors as false. It was during July that negotiations were taking place concerning a new Union Treaty. The republics had built upon the example of Russia and declared their sovereignty. They then began the task of securing as many rights for themselves as possible. Although most of the republics’ leaders recognized that they needed some central authority capable of resolving common problems, they also wanted to tackle their own affairs without interference.

23 Ibid.
The details of the Union Treaty were agreed upon on July 23, 1991—the same month that Boris Yeltsin was officially inaugurated as the president of Russia. The Union Treaty was scheduled to be signed the following month. On Sunday, August 18, just two days before the Union Treaty was scheduled to be signed, information began to filter to President Bush, who was vacationing at his home in Kennebunkport, Maine, that Gorbachev had been removed from office and that a “State Committee for the State of Emergency” had been setup. The committee included Vice President Gennady Yanayev, Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov, KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov, Oleg Baklanov, who was in charge of the military-industrial complex, Interior Minister Boris Pugo, and two civilians: Valery Starodubstev and A.I. Tizyakov. These eight men were all hard-liners and now seemed to be in control of the Soviet government. That was the problem facing the Bush administration. They really did not know if the coup was successful or what had become of Gorbachev. Bush immediately engaged in frantic telephone diplomacy, calling John Major, François Mitterrand, and Helmut Kohl to see if they had any more information than the Americans had been able to obtain. Coordinating their responses, all agreed to avoid statements that might give legitimacy to the new coup. Bush conducted an impromptu press conference at Walker’s Point at which he described the coup attempt as “extra-constitutional” and a “disturbing development.” Admitting that he had few details of the situation currently taking place in the Soviet Union, Bush promised to “watch the situation unfold” before taking any action, warning that it was too early to write off Gorbachev because coups are not always successful—“Coup
can fail," he added hopefully. By the end of the day, Bush had received a letter from the plotters explaining the "official" reasons for the coup:

There has emerged a situation of uncontrollability with too many centers of power. All this cannot but cause widespread discontent of the population. There has also been a real threat of the country's disintegration, of a breakdown of the single economic space, and the single civil rights space, the single defense, and the single foreign policy. A normal life under these conditions is impossible. As a result of inter-ethnic clashes there has been bloodshed in many areas of the USSR. A disintegration of the USSR would have gravest concerns not only internally, but internationally as well. Under these circumstances we have no other choice but to take resolute measures in order to stop the slide towards catastrophe...

The deep uncertainty and discomfort among the senior ranks of the Soviet military that General Powell had witnessed earlier that year were apparent in the letter. And although Yanayev claimed that the new regime would honor the international agreements and continue Gorbachev's reforms, there were plenty of reasons to doubt him. Bush flew back to Washington that night still wondering what, if any, action he should take. His daily diary indicates that he was especially concerned with how his administration would be criticized. Reporters were already asking why the Bush administration had not anticipated the coup. This was evident in the fact that Bush, along with many of his cabinet, was on vacation. The Bush team quickly assembled an eight-point plan for action:

1. Make an assessment. Meet with advisors to determine how we can influence the situation. Perhaps through arms control or economic aid
2. Get Marlin [Fitzwater] back to Kennebunkport
3. Contact the South American leaders and stress to them the necessity for the entire hemisphere to speak out against the coup
4. Make sure the U.S. message is constant and steady
5. Stay in touch with Yeltsin

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6. No politics
7. Get our information out to our people so that we speak with one voice
8. Change the work schedule from the relaxed vacation schedule to one that was more formal

The plan of action was more reactive than proactive; however, there was little that Bush could do until he learned more about the situation in the Soviet Union. The most important item on the list was the need to stay in constant contact with Yeltsin.

Bush placed a call to Yeltsin the next morning, August 20, 1991. Unlike his repeated calls to Gorbachev, Bush was actually able to reach Yeltsin who informed him of the situation:

The situation is very complex... President Gorbachev is located in Foros in the Crimea. He is absolutely blocked, no way of reaching him. President [sic] Yanayev is using the pretext that Gorbachev is ill, but this is not yet confirmed. Essentially a committee of eight people has taken over the presidency and established a state of emergency in Russian territory and the Baltics. Troops have been brought up to Moscow, not only in the city, but in Moscow District and surrounding towns. And by issuing [these] decision[s], the group has exposed itself as no more than a right-wing junta. I appeared before the people and soldiers and I said that actions of the committee were unconstitutional, illegal, and have no force on Russian territory.

Remarkably, the man that most observers considered Gorbachev’s main political opponent ardently defended him during the coup attempt. Over the next few days, Bush stayed in regular contact with Yeltsin and came to gain a new respect for the Russian leader. While Yeltsin was voicing his condemnation of the coup in Russia, Bush continued to call for the restoration of the legitimate government. In a press conference on August 20, 1991, Bush, in a somber and resolute tone, declared that

26 Reported by CNN on August 22, 1991. Video footage provided by the Bush Presidential Library.
27 Memorandum of telephone conversation between George Bush and Boris Yeltsin, 8/20/91, National Security Council, Nicholas Burns/Ed Hewitt Files, George Bush Presidential Library. Also quoted in Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 527.
U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union—MFN status, grain credits, etc.—would be put on hold until there was a resolution of the crisis and the constitutional government was restored. In his statement, Bush praised Yeltsin for "standing courageously against military force." The intent of Bush's words was not to threaten the coup plotters but to keep the heat on. He knew that the United States did not need to get involved militarily and he knew that the coup leaders controlled enough of the military to crush Yeltsin. Bush had to rely on international pressure and hope that Yeltsin, who organized a demonstration of more than 150,000 people, could generate enough public pressure to force the coup leaders to release Gorbachev. Bush was betting that the coup leaders had underestimated the power of the people in their calculations, that the Soviet people were committed to democracy, and that the reforms started by Gorbachev could not be easily reversed. He knew that, if the coup failed, the hardliners' influence would be broken and democracy would take a gigantic leap forward. Bush and the world watched over the next few days as Yeltsin put on a masterful performance. He had the Russian Supreme Soviet unanimously declare the coup attempt illegal. The other republics soon followed suit and the coup fell apart. Bush, on vacation and out riding in his boat, the Fidelity, was summoned to shore to receive a telephone call. Scowcroft had instructed the Signal (military) switchboard to periodically attempt to call Gorbachev and had finally gotten through. Bush rushed into his home at Kennebunkport to speak with Gorbachev (See figure 5.3):

Bush: Oh my God, that's wonderful. Mikhail!

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Figure 5.3. George Bush receiving a call from Gorbachev after the failed coup attempt. Kennebunkport. August 21, 1991. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
Gorbachev: My dearest George. I am so happy to hear your voice again.

Bush: My God, I’m glad to hear you. How are you doing?

Gorbachev: Mr. President, the adventurers have not succeeded. 29

The two men talked like old friends excited to hear from the other. It also suggests why some felt that Bush had become too friendly with Gorbachev and had stayed with him even when it was becoming apparent that Yeltsin was gaining power. James Baker explains the Bush administration’s outrage to such charges:

The press loved that argument and they used to write it. They also wrote that Clinton stuck with Yeltsin too long. But when you’ve got a reformer in power and things are going the way you want ’em to go, then you stick with that person, particularly when they’re freely elected, as Yeltsin was. So, that’s just a fun and games exercise by the press that don’t know what they’re talking about. . . . What did we lose by hanging in there with Gorbachev and Shevardnadze? When Yeltsin came to power, he embraced us even more whole-heartedly. We didn’t lose a damn thing. And we gained a lot. So, we’ll shoot that one down.... That argument is just totally without foundation or without rationality or reason. If you look at what happened, yes, we stuck with Gorbachev. He was the general secretary and then president of the Soviet Union. And when Yeltsin came onboard . . . when I went over there in December of ‘91 before the implosion of the Soviet Union, I met with Yeltsin. He met me in St. Catherine’s Hall. Why’d he do that? To stick it in Gorbachev’s eye. But certainly his embrace of the United States was total and complete, 100 percent, every bit as much as Gorbachev. We didn’t lose anything by doing that. 30

Certainly, Bush did side with Gorbachev until the coup attempt. During and after the coup attempt, however, Bush switched his support to Yeltsin. Yeltsin’s actions during the failed coup attempt made him a force to be reckoned with, and Gorbachev faced a very difficult political reality. Central Soviet authority was declining at an accelerated rate and the Communist Party was discredited. Telephone records show that calls

29 Memorandum of telephone conversation between George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev, 8/21/91, National Security Council, Nicholas Burns Files, George Bush Presidential Library. See also Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 531-32.
between Bush and Yeltsin increased sharply beginning with the coup and continued to outpace calls between Bush and Gorbachev until the Soviet Union collapsed.\(^{31}\) Bush’s diary just a couple of months after the coup, the day before he was to meet with Gorbachev in Madrid, demonstrates just how quickly things changed:

Diary, October 26
It is clear to me that things are an awful lot different regarding Gorbachev and the Center than they were. He’s growing weaker all the time. I am anxious to see what his mood is. He’s still important in nuclear matters, but all the economic stuff—it looks to me like the republics have been more and more exerting themselves. It will be interesting to figure out his mood. I remember not so long ago how he couldn’t stand Yeltsin. How he, up at Camp David [in June 1990], made clear he didn’t think Yeltsin was going anywhere. But, now all that has changed. Reports recently that he might not be around long. The briefing book indicates this may be my last meeting with him of this nature. Time marches on.\(^{32}\)

This shift in power was also evident in Bush’s public comments. Every time that Bush mentioned Gorbachev, he now also mentioned Yeltsin—an obvious sign of the changing reality in the Soviet Union. This change had begun when Yeltsin won his popular election and became a properly-elected leader. During the coup attempt, the world watched Yeltsin in charge, on top of a tank, directing the opposition, almost single-handedly defeating the coup. That is the image people remembered because Gorbachev was not to be seen. Even Bush was sure to mention to the press that Gorbachev’s first telephone call had been to Yeltsin. Yeltsin was, along with the republics, on the rise. The failed coup had accelerated the demise of Gorbachev, and with him, the Soviet Union.

\(^{31}\) Based on an analysis of the Telcon and Memcon records, George Bush Presidential Library.
At the time of the coup attempt, the world did not really know what had happened to Gorbachev. In his memoirs, Gorbachev gives a detailed account supported by passages from his wife’s diary of what was occurring in his dacha.\textsuperscript{33} He was visited on the night before he was scheduled to leave for the signing ceremony of the new Union Treaty by several of the coup plotters who informed Gorbachev of the creation of an emergency committee and demanded that he sign the decree on the declaration of a state of emergency. When he refused, they suggested that he turn control over to Vice President Yanayev because of “failing health” or resign completely. Gorbachev refused; the plotters stormed out of the dacha leaving Gorbachev and his family confined to the premises and with all outside communications severed. Gorbachev would remain there for a total of 73 hours, as the emergency committee told the world that Gorbachev was experiencing “health problems.” It would not be until August 21, with the realization by the coup plotters that they had failed to gain public support, that outside communications were restored to Gorbachev’s dacha and he was free to leave. The coup had failed in large part to the fact that Gorbachev had succeeded in establishing better relations with the outside world. Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein were the only world leaders to express approval of the coup. Along with the democratic achievements of perestroika and Yeltsin’s ability to rally public support, the condemnation by world leaders helped convince the coup leaders to end Gorbachev’s captivity. Upon returning to Moscow, Gorbachev made a statement:

\textsuperscript{33} Gorbachev, \textit{Memoirs}, 626-645.
I have come back from Foros [where he was held captive] to another country, and I myself am a different man now.\textsuperscript{34}

Gorbachev’s statement was correct in many respects. He had hoped that the Union Treaty would help transform the Soviet Union into a viable democratic federation. But the coup attempt had delivered to the separatists and extreme radicals a compelling argument to support the breakup of the Soviet Union. In an ironic twist, the coup, which had been led by hard-liners attempting to keep the Soviet Union from transforming, led to its complete breakup. The coup produced, in the words of Gorbachev, a “landslide” and “a strong impulse for disintegration.”\textsuperscript{35} Gorbachev himself resigned his post of general secretary of the Communist Party and recommended that the Central Committee be dissolved because he felt betrayed by the party leadership and a large number of party functionaries who had not supported him during the coup attempt. All of the republics declared their independence in September and October 1991. The coup shattered the process of establishing new Union ties between sovereign states and had left the machinery of the state in disorder.

Authorities within the republics implemented only those decisions of the Union ministries they considered advantageous for themselves, ignoring the rest. To make matters even harder to control for Gorbachev was the fact that power was now divided between the Kremlin and the Russian White House. This, of course, is explained by Yeltsin’s increased status; he continued issuing decrees that applied to the entire Union for several days after Gorbachev returned to power. It seemed only a matter of time before Yeltsin would use his power to take complete control of the Kremlin.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 642.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 646.
The breakup of the Soviet Union seemed to many to be a victory rather than a tragedy. The debate quickly centered on what would emerge out of the old Soviet Union. Gorbachev urged a union of sovereign states, a confederative state that would carry out the functions delegated to it by the various republics. Yeltsin, however, wanted a commonwealth of fully independent countries. Gorbachev warned that any gains attained from sovereignty could not compensate for the losses incurred as a result of the complete breakup of the USSR. The final agreement came as a result of a secret meeting between Yeltsin, Leonid Kravchuck, the president of Ukraine, and Stanislav Shushkevich, the president of Belarus. They met at Minsk during the first days of December 1991. At the meeting, the three leaders decided to dissolve the USSR and establish the CIS, or Commonwealth of Independent States. The purpose of the meeting had been zealously guarded because the three leaders did not want Gorbachev to attempt to stop them. It was not until the three leaders had reached full agreement and called President Bush to ask for his support that they called Gorbachev to inform him of the situation. During their phone call to Gorbachev, they told him President Bush had already given his support to their agreement. Gorbachev angrily replied to Yeltsin:

What you have done behind my back with the consent of the U.S. president is a crying shame, a disgrace! 36

According to Bush, he had been very careful not to either accept or reject the agreement reached by the three leaders at Minsk:

To me, the provisions sounded as though they’d been designed specifically to gain U.S. support for what was being done, since they directly addressed the

36 Ibid., 659.
conditions for recognition we had laid out. I did not want to imply prematurely our approval or disapproval. 'I see,' I said simply.37

Since the transcript of that phone conversation remains classified, there is no way yet to know whose account to believe.38 Gorbachev believed that Bush had given his approval to the Minsk agreement and the subsequent actions by the Bush administration did nothing to suggest otherwise. In fact, even in Bush’s account, he basically told Yeltsin that he would go along with the agreement if Yeltsin gained the support of the other republics:

I promised to read the accord as soon as he sent it to me and to respond quickly. I felt a little uncomfortable. ‘We will work with you and others as this develops,’ I said. ‘Of course, we hope that this whole evolution is a peaceful process.’ Sidestepping the question of American support for Yeltsin’s implication, I added that we understood this must be sorted out by the participants, not by outside parties such as the United States. Yeltsin agreed, and confidently added that he was sure all of the other republics would join them soon.39

Another reason that Gorbachev was willing to believe that Bush would go along with Yeltsin’s plan was the way that he had acted since the coup attempt. Gorbachev knew that Bush had been shifting his support to Yeltsin and was under increasing domestic pressure to recognize the sovereignty of the republics. In fact, the key to Yeltsin’s success in convincing the other republics to agree to the Minsk agreement was the situation in Ukraine, which had not agreed to join the new Union proposed by Gorbachev. Yeltsin, and many other presidents of republics, did not feel that the Treaty on the Union of Sovereign States would be viable without Ukraine. Without

37 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 555.
38 Memorandum of telephone conversation between George Bush and Boris Yeltsin, 12/8/91, National Security Council, Nicholas Burns/Ed Hewitt Files, George Bush Presidential Library.
39 Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 555-556.
Ukraine, the two Slavic countries, Belarus and Russia, could be outvoted. Adding to Gorbachev’s troubles was Bush’s decision to recognize Ukraine. The information had leaked out after a meeting between Bush and some Ukrainian Americans. The news infuriated Gorbachev, who called Bush to voice his displeasure. Bush, however, had made up his mind. His decision to recognize Ukrainian independence, a decision that came four days before the Ukrainians themselves voted on independence, was based, according to Brent Scowcroft, entirely on domestic politics.\footnote{Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.} Bush had complained to Gorbachev in October during a Middle East peace conference in Madrid that the coming year was going to be difficult for him because of the looming presidential election.\footnote{Gorbachev, \textit{Memoirs}, 665.} Bush’s foreign policy decisions would increasingly be influenced by domestic policy concerns. His decision to recognize Ukrainian independence as well as his decision to back Yeltsin seem, in retrospect, almost inevitable given the pressures that he faced at home and the disagreement within his own foreign policy apparatus.

American policy disagreements came to a head in a long NSC meeting on September 5, 1991. It was a complex situation: the Baltics had been granted independence by the Soviet State Council and republics throughout the Soviet Union were threatening to secede. It was still very unclear what would happen. Dick Cheney called for an aggressive approach:

I assume these developments are far from over. . . . We could get an authoritarian regime still. I am concerned that a year or so from now, if it all goes sour, how we can answer why we didn’t do more. . . . We ought to lead and shape events. . . . The voluntary breakup of the Soviet Union is in our
interest. If it’s a voluntary association, it will happen. If democracy fails, we’re better off if they’re small. 42

Cheney, in essence, argued that the United States should actively encourage the breakup of the Soviet Union. He did not simply want to react to events—he wanted to use the leverage that he believed the Bush administration had to shape the outcome. He suggested establishing consulates in all the republics and providing humanitarian assistance. Cheney’s basic premise rested on his belief that the United States would be dealing with 15 or 16 independent countries. Baker disagreed: “The peaceful breakup of the Soviet Union is in our interest. We don’t want another Yugoslavia.”43 In particular, Baker wanted to avoid a Russian-Ukrainian clash. He felt it was best not to exacerbate any disputes among the center, Russia, and Ukraine.44 When Scowcroft and Baker added that aid programs from the West were based on the premise of a strong center and that the United States should try to prop up the center, Cheney dismissed it as “old thinking.” He saw Ukraine as the key to whether or not a viable Union could be maintained and predicted that it would not join a new Union. The possibility of a weak center especially disturbed Colin Powell, who worried about the fate and command and control of nuclear weapons:

We want to see the dissolution of the old Soviet Union. I am not sure that means fifteen republics walking around. Some confederation is in our interest as well as seeking out bilateral relationships. . . . I am comfortable with where they [nuclear weapons] are. Who has them is the more important question. The Red Army has them now. If they move back to Russia, I am not sure who will be in control.45

42 Quoted in Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 541.
43 Ibid.
45 Quoted in Bush and Scowcroft, A World Transformed, 542.
The meeting ended without any clear decision. Scowcroft explains that the Bush administration really could not decide which plan would be preferable:

We had a long debate about what our preferences were, and Baker was on one side of the arguments that you just made [that it would be preferable to have at least some form of the Soviet Union survive rather than face the possibility of chaos because a strong central authority could at least maintain reliable control over the nuclear arsenal]; Cheney was on the other side saying we actively ought to split up the Soviet Union. And we debated and came to no firm conclusion. So we really didn’t have a position. We just let nature take its course.\(^4\)\(^6\)

Bush knew, however, that he wanted the process, regardless of which one occurred, to be a peaceful one and one that did not rush to independence at the expense of true democratic reforms. In Ukraine, in what would be labeled by the press as his “chicken Kiev” speech, Bush warned against local despotism:

But freedom cannot survive if we let despots flourish or permit seemingly minor restrictions to multiply until they form chains, until they form shackles. Later today, I’ll visit the monument at Babi Yar, a somber reminder, a solemn reminder of what happens when people fail to hold back the horrible tide of intolerance and tyranny. Yet freedom is not the same as independence. Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred. We will support those who want to build democracy.\(^4\)\(^7\)

Many members of the press mistakenly thought that Bush’s speech was meant to dissuade the republics that were seeking self-determination. Instead, rather than calling for the Soviet Union to remain intact, Bush was warning against the outbreak of violence that could result from an upsurge of intolerant nationalism. U.S.

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\(^4\) Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
Ambassador to the Soviet Union Jack Matlock explains the reason for Bush’s warning:

Well, there were several reasons. One was that the nationalists in several of the republics wanted independence for their own reasons, and the Communists in other republics, once they saw that the Communist Party was losing power, wanted independence in order to save themselves and stay in power. This happened in central Asia. You ended up with five dictators in central Asia in those five countries and keeping the old system primarily open; therefore, with all of their talk of opening up the economies, they were basically a totalitarian political system in the way that they controlled things. I think that is why I think Bush was right when he said don’t confuse independence with freedom. In other words, if you have freedom and you want independence, eventually you’re going to get it. But, if you take independence under conditions before you get freedom, you could be deprived of freedom for a long time, and that’s happening in a lot of the republics. In fact, in all of them, except the Baltic states, it’s happening. Now, I think we understood that we couldn’t do it for them. It’s something they had to do for themselves.48

While the Bush administration had varying views on what course of action would be best for the Soviet Union, the overriding concern, notwithstanding Cheney, was that they wanted the Soviet Union to work out the internal problems on their own and in a way that ensured a peaceful process. This preoccupation with assuring a peaceful process led Baker and the State Department to come up with a set of “five principles” that were similar to the “four principles,” which had been used as a guideline on German unification:

(1) peaceful self-determination consistent with democratic values and principles
(2) respect for existing borders, with any changes occurring peacefully and consensually
(3) respect for democracy and the rule of law, especially elections and referenda
(4) human rights, particularly minority rights
(5) respect for international law and obligations49

48 Jack F. Matlock, Jr., interview by author, Boston, Massachusetts, 6 January 2001.
Baker intended to use the “five principles” to create a political structure to guide U.S. policy through the transition period of the Soviet Union. Later, a sixth principle would be added—central control over nuclear weapons, and safeguards against internal or external proliferation. Despite these principles, the Bush administration never arrived at a rigid policy on the potential breakup of the Soviet Union. This was due to the sheer rapidity of the events and the fact that many in the administration still had views that differed from Baker’s. Most agreed, however, that the United States did have some role to play in regard to external concerns and obligations. Knowing that he would need the support of the United States, Yeltsin obviously geared the Minsk agreement to meet the concerns publicly expressed by the Bush administration. The plan that he read over the telephone after secretly meeting with the presidents of Ukraine and Belarus guaranteed international obligations, including foreign aid debt, under agreements and treaties signed by the former Soviet Union and provided for unitary control of nuclear weapons and nonproliferation. It was reasonable for Yeltsin to assume that the Bush administration would likely agree to a plan that seemed to mesh with the six principles outlined in various official U.S. public statements. That is, of course, if he could follow through with his claim that the other republics would soon be in agreement. And Yeltsin’s prediction soon came true. The Minsk agreement was released while the republics’ parliaments were reviewing the Treaty on the Union of Sovereign States drafted by the USSR State Council and supported by Gorbachev. Their attention quickly turned to the Minsk agreement with 11 republics approving it almost immediately and the Central Asian states joining in at a later date. Despite the continued objections by Gorbachev, the Declaration of Adherence to the
Commonwealth of Independent States was signed on December 21, 1991, at Alma-Ata, by all of the republics save the Baltic states and Georgia.

On December 25, 1991, Gorbachev signed a decree relinquishing his duties as president of the USSR. The end of the Soviet Union was not a surprise. President Bush had already had his staff write a letter to Gorbachev to be sent on the day he resigned. He had also had them write a draft statement on the resignation that praised Gorbachev for his contributions in ending the Cold War. Bush received the final draft the day before Gorbachev’s announcement. In reality, Gorbachev’s resignation was anticlimactic. Yeltsin had been methodically stripping Gorbachev of power since the coup, thus ensuring that the Soviet Union would cease to exist. The morning of Gorbachev’s resignation Bush received a final call from Gorbachev. Bush was spending Christmas day at Camp David with his family. Despite the events that led to Gorbachev’s fall and Bush’s role in recognizing Yeltsin, Bush and Gorbachev remained close friends. In fact, it had been Bush who tried to keep relations between Gorbachev and Yeltsin as cordial as possible and ensure a peaceful transfer of power.

As Bush’s press secretary recalls:

Maybe one of the best examples was when Yeltsin replaced Gorbachev after the coup attempt. It was President Bush who got on the phone to Yeltsin and convinced him that in a peaceful turnover, he needed to be good to Gorbachev. And [he] told him to give him a car, give him a house, and treat him well. And Yeltsin didn’t want to because he hated Gorbachev, and then Bush called Gorbachev and said the same thing—You want to demonstrate a peaceful transition; you got to be praising Yeltsin or at least don’t be criticizing him in public. Don’t be tearing him down and picking a fight. You two guys have got

50 “Draft Statement of Resignation of President Gorbachev,” 12/24/91, National Security Council, Nicholas Burns Files, George Bush Presidential Library.
51 Memorandum of telephone conversation between George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev, 12/25/91, National Security Council, Nicholas Burns Files, George Bush Presidential Library.
to show that you can change power peacefully. And that’s the hallmark of that period for President Bush.\textsuperscript{52}

Despite the relationship between Bush and Gorbachev, in the end, Bush supported the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many western politicians of the Cold War Era had seen the breakup of the Soviet Union as the main goal of the Cold War. Bush was of that generation but was also fearful that the disintegration of the Soviet Union could leave a dangerous and unpredictable geopolitical vacuum. In that final telephone conversation, Gorbachev assured Bush that he was leaving everything under reliable control. He was, of course, referring to the former Soviet Union’s nuclear weapons. The lack of central authority did open up the danger of the loss of physical control of the country’s nuclear weapons. The Soviet arsenal of nuclear weapons was concentrated in four republics: Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus. The United States was not entirely confident that all four of the republics could handle or secure the weapons or fissionable materials to their satisfaction. The Bush administration had finally, after much debate among the advisors, reached the conclusion that it would be preferable to see the nuclear weapons under the control of one entity that had both the experience and stability to control them. Gorbachev agreed with this and, just before leaving office, turned over the “presidential briefcase,” which contained the control system for nuclear arms to Yeltsin, so it would be controlled by the Russian Federation.\textsuperscript{53} Russia would also take the Soviet Union’s place on the United Nations Security Council. Gorbachev assured Bush that he could celebrate Christmas without worry. In an address from the Oval Office on Christmas night, Bush spoke to the

\textsuperscript{52} Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.

\textsuperscript{53} Gorbachev, \textit{Memoirs}, 671
nation to explain the historic change that had taken place that day (See figure 5.4).  
He expressed gratitude to Gorbachev for his commitment to peace—giving Gorbachev’s policies the credit for changing the USSR. But he also gave credit to American policies, citing the nine American presidents since the Cold War started as playing key roles in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Bush then offered a three-tier recognition process. The United States would first fully recognize Russia and Yeltsin. Then full diplomatic recognition would be extended to the republics that had taken proper steps to achieving stability. Finally, the United States would recognize the independence of the rest of the republics on a conditionary basis. “Our Enemies have become our partners,” Bush told American viewers—with that, the official seal was placed on the end of the Cold War. One final vestige of the Cold War was wrapped up by START II (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty). The breakup of the Soviet Union had convinced Bush to reduce the number of nuclear weapons on both sides even further than what had been agreed upon in START. Scowcroft suggested getting rid of all tactical nuclear weapons with the exception of air-delivered ones. Short-range nuclear weapons were becoming increasingly undesirable. For example, in Europe, with the unification of Germany, short-range nuclear missiles would detonate on German territory. They were also problematic for the Navy, who had received complaints from countries that were reluctant to allow warships carrying nuclear weapons into their ports. Scowcroft also suggested de-MIRVing of the ICBM force,

54 Address from the Oval Office, December 25, 1991. Video footage provided by the George Bush Presidential Library.
Figure 5.4. Bush prepares to speak from the Oval Office on Christmas night, 1991, announcing that the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. (Courtesy of the George Bush Presidential Library.)
perhaps the most destabilizing nuclear weapons used by either side.\textsuperscript{55} These suggestions developed into START II, which was signed just before President Bush left office in January 1993.

\textbf{Why did Gorbachev fail?}

If the basic goal of the Cold War was seen by many to be the breakup of the Soviet Union, then it is important to understand Gorbachev's failure because the collapse of the Soviet Union mirrored the collapse of Gorbachev. An understanding of Gorbachev's failure thus provides an explanation of why the Soviet Union itself imploded. The first step is to look at the task that Gorbachev had to address immediately upon taking power—the failing Soviet economy. The Soviet economy was failing because of isolation from the world economy. A fundamental shift in the Soviet Union's foreign policies had to be made in order to end its economic and political isolation. Those foreign policies had, in the past, made the Soviet Union a pariah within the international system. Shifting those foreign policies, however, would directly contradict what had been a source of pride for the Soviet Union. As Soviet expert Condoleezza Rice points out, "The Soviet Union had taken pride in being a pariah—neither an accomplice to nor a victim of global capitalism's exploitation of the world."\textsuperscript{56} This was the basic understanding of Marxist-Leninist ideology that had been used by Soviet leaders. The central tenet of Marxist-Leninist ideology since Joseph Stalin's rule had been that the Soviet Union's long-term interests could not be reconciled with the interests of an "international economic and political order

\textsuperscript{55} This would mean that intercontinental ballistic missiles would no longer have multiple warheads that could be targeted separately.
dominated by capitalist democracies.\textsuperscript{57} According to this ideology, the Cold War and the separation that it required was the very foundation of the Soviet Union. Until the day when socialism finally triumphed, that division had to be maintained in order to provide insulation from an international economic system that could destroy the Soviet Union. Stalin had actually formulated this plan prior to World War II. He felt that the Soviet Union should be self-sufficient until a “ring of socialist brother states” would come along to provide the resources and additional insulation and security to protect against capitalism. Once this happened, a truly alternative system would be in place to counter capitalist democracies. This helps explain the evidence presented by the Venona intercepts and why the Soviet Union would be waging an espionage war against a supposed ally.\textsuperscript{58} Of course, Stalin achieved the spheres of influence that he needed in the aftermath of World War II. He would use Eastern Europe’s resources to build a stronger Soviet Union, one that could hope to outlast capitalism. But the socialist economies had a flaw that the capitalist democracies did not—the system could not be regulated by the market. Therefore, the Soviets had to build a structure to coordinate the socialist economies. This structure, found largely in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), would further isolate them from the capitalist democracies of the West. The American containment policy actually mirrored Stalin’s original blueprint, providing further insulation. Unfortunately for the East, it also kept them from gaining access to changing technologies that would have benefited the


\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} See John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, \textit{VENONA: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America} (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999).
Soviet military economy as well as civilian needs. This flaw was readily apparent in the 1970s as the Soviet Union increasingly relied on foreign technologies as well as imported grain. This did not dissuade the Soviet Union from its goal. It hoped to revitalize its system through détente by acquiring technological help from the West while affirming its superpower status. On the other hand, the West hoped to use détente to force the Soviets into a “web of interdependence” that would chip away at the insulation from the economic and political order dominated by capitalist democracies. The hopes of the West had dissipated by the end of the 1970s as they realized that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the Soviet buildup of conventional forces demonstrated that they were trying to turn détente into a victory rather than an accommodation. President Carter responded to this challenge by ordering a sharp increase in defense spending at the end of his term. President Reagan extended this increase to even higher levels. After decades of economic stagnation, the Soviet Union could not match American technological innovation and could not afford to continue trying to overwhelm with brute strength. This placed Gorbachev in a very difficult position. He knew that the very foundation of Marxist-Leninist ideology was the precept of a “permanent revolution” in which the socialist states would have to outlast the capitalist democracies. He knew that although the Soviet system was not in immediate danger of collapsing, the reality was that the West could almost certainly last longer. He could either follow the pattern set by previous Soviet leaders and wait for the system to eventually collapse because of economic pressure, or he could seek to reform the system by ending Soviet isolation and reintegrating it into the international system creating, in the words of Gorbachev, a “common European
home.” This, of course, would mean the end of the Cold War. His critics would charge that such a move would shake the very foundation of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Communist Party. Gorbachev, however, was more concerned with practical and fundamental reforms. He was a genuine reformer whose goal, unlike his predecessors, was not to accumulate more power for himself and the Communist Party but to establish a government based on the consent of the governed. In theory and on paper, the Soviet state was a voluntary federation of sovereign republics. But in practice, the Soviet Union operated as an imperial state. As Gorbachev himself recalls, perestroika was meant to end this totalitarian system:

Yes, there were political, economic, and social problems—and problems between nationalities. These were not, however, problems of our country as a whole but of the system that had been established. This administrative-bureaucratic system, this totalitarian system, could not respond adequately to the problems that had built up. Not only did it fail to contribute to their solution; it deepened and intensified them. As a result, by the 1980s our country had entered a stage of crisis. It was in order to overcome this crisis that perestroika was begun.

The realization in the 1980s that the Soviet Union could not win the arms race helped Gorbachev deal with the hard-liners. Yet he still could only push limited reforms for fear of being removed from office by the Central Committee if he began to be seen as too radical. In short, Gorbachev realized that the Soviet Union could not continue as it had. He knew that the change must occur internally but with the cooperation of the West. But Gorbachev wanted to reform the Soviet Union, not destroy it, as the hard-liners accused him of doing. He wanted to transform the empire into a federated or confederated state:

Today the assertion can often be heard that the Union treaty that was to be signed in August 1991 would have meant the destruction of the Soviet Union anyway. No! The signing of the treaty would have been a real alternative to the breakup of the Union. It would have meant preservation of Union-wide citizenship, which was recognized as a separate point in the document. The citizen of any state belonging to the Union was simultaneously a citizen of the Union. That was Article 2 of the treaty. The new Union treaty would have meant preservation and development of a unified Unionwide market. Armed forces under a single command (not “joint command”) would have been preserved. The state security of the Union as a whole and a unified foreign policy would have been assured. Preservation, renewal, and reform of the Union was my main political and, if you will, moral task in my position as president of the USSR. I consider it my greatest sorrow and misfortune that I did not succeed in preserving the country as a single whole. All my efforts were focused on trying to preserve that unity.60

But Gorbachev failed to preserve that unity. His failure was assured by the August coup and the damage that it did to his ability to lead. According to Boris Yeltsin’s journal:

Instead of a gradual transition from the unitarian Soviet Union to a softer, freer confederation, we had a complete vacuum at the political center. The center—in the person of Gorbachev—was totally demoralized. The emerging national states had lost faith in him. Something had to be done.61

The only real chance that the Soviet Union had of remaining intact was for Gorbachev and Yeltsin to cooperate. Their personal antagonism prevented this from happening. From the time of the coup attempt, Yeltsin began seizing the bureaucratic structures of the Soviet Union in an effort to destroy the Soviet state and, with it, Gorbachev. In the past, Russia had been ruled directly by the central ministries. A fully sovereign Russia needed the institutions of government controlled by Gorbachev in order to prevent political gridlock. Certainly, Yeltsin would not remain content to share Moscow with Gorbachev. Thus, it was Gorbachev, backed into a corner by the August coup and

60 Ibid., 158.
Yeltsin, who bore the primary responsibility for bringing about the end of communism as a system of rule in the USSR and the end of the Soviet Union itself. The United States, as Ambassador Matlock explains, could only play a supporting role:

Obviously, some of the things we pushed for to end the Cold War, such as opening up the country, bringing in democratic processes, supporting the election process, were things that made the eventual disintegration of the Soviet Union possible. . . . In that sense, by opening up the country, encouraging them to open up and so on, we created conditions which when they could not deal with these other pressures, the state collapsed. So I’m not saying that none of our policies had any relevance. I’m just saying that we didn’t bring it about. We didn’t have the power to bring it about. It was brought about internally. Some of these internal forces had been encouraged by the United States and the West in general, not so much by a direct action, although by that to, but by our very existence. After all, as long as we [the West] existed as free societies, as democratic societies, with economies that seemed to work, we were a threat to the Soviet system. And what their task was to try to be more like us without admitting it. And we were really in favor of that. It turned out that they couldn’t. Well, that was their problem.62

The end of the Cold War set in motion forces that attacked the very foundation of the socialist system. By encouraging democratization, human rights, and the free flow of information, the United States helped introduce outside pressure on a flawed system. But in the end, Gorbachev would be the one who had to alter the existing system in an effort to save his country, not destroy it. The type of radical change that could have made the Soviet Union viable, however, was exactly the type of change that it had been designed to block.63

62 Jack F. Matlock, Jr., interview by author, Boston, Massachusetts, 6 January 2001.
63 Matlock, Autopsy on an Empire, 650.
Chapter 6
The Prudent Cold Warrior:
The Foreign Policy Legacy of George Bush

Assessing the impact of any recent president is a difficult task for historians. The very use of the word legacy suggests a sense of judgement that is unavoidably subjective. It is necessary, however, now that a reasonable amount of time has passed since the ending of the Cold War, to examine the presidential organizational and policy making arrangements that shaped that end at a time when many of the men and women who influenced those decisions are still alive to be questioned by historians. Interviews with President Bush’s principal aides and advisors have been a central underpinning of this study. It is still impossible to provide a complete, if history is ever complete, view of the end of the Cold War because of limited, though not inconsequential, amount of documents available for research. Documents have been declassified and released to the public in sporadic bursts, offering a continuously changing image of exactly what occurred. This study is based on many recently declassified documents that challenge some of the well-accepted views of the Cold War. There is no reason to be alarmed if some preconceptions are challenged or even replaced. As Cold War historian John Lewis Gaddis reminds us, “Cold War historians should retain the capacity to be surprised.”¹ Thus, it has been the purpose of this study to show the foreign policy apparatus and the decision-making process of the Bush administration to provide an accurate portrayal of the Bush administration’s role in ending the Cold War.

No one man ended the Cold War. Neither Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, George Bush, or any other single leader had that type of impact. But each influenced, by their foreign policy successes and mistakes, when and how that end would occur. In order to gage the true impact of these figures, one must understand when and exactly how that end was realized. The exact date has been endlessly argued by Cold War historians. For the general public, the end of the Cold War is usually marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall. The dramatic television images of Germans “dancing on the wall”—something George Bush refused to do—are memorable. But the building of the Berlin Wall did not mark the beginning of the Cold War, nor did the fall of the Berlin Wall mark its end. So when did the Cold War end? Participants cannot agree on an exact time. Some members of the Reagan administration still insist that it was over by the time that Reagan left office. Attorney General Edwin Meese, perhaps Reagan’s most devoted admirer, hailed Reagan as “the man who ended the Cold War.”

Secretary of State George Schultz implies much the same as he recounts the final months of the Reagan administration in his memoir:

It was as if the whole world had breathed a deep sigh of relief. An immense tension had gone out of the system. The world had changed. Margaret Thatcher had it right. In an interview with the Washington Post and Newsweek on November 17, during her last official visit to Washington during the Reagan administration, she said flatly, “We’re not in a Cold War now.” Despite this new reality, many in the United States seemed unable or unwilling to grasp this seminal fact. But to me, it was all over but the shouting.

The “shouting,” as Schultz describes it, would entail the collapse of Communist control of Eastern Europe, the reunification of Germany, the disintegration of the

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Warsaw Pact, and the breakup of the Soviet Union. Claiming that the Cold War ended in 1988 and declaring Reagan the man who had single-handedly won the war shows, of course, very heavy bias by Reagan loyalists whose own reputations and legacies are inextricably tied to that of Reagan’s. There is strong evidence to negate the claims of Reagan loyalists. Certainly Reagan’s strategy of “peace through strength” or “negotiation from strength” had helped the Soviets to lose ground to the United States as far as military and economic power. But the Soviet Union remained a formidable nuclear power and, in terms of raw numbers, still held an edge in conventional forces in Europe. In addition, as historian Joseph Powers argues, “With the rise to power of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 a Soviet leader once again assumed a prominent role in world affairs reminiscent of Khrushchev’s during the 1950s.”4 Certainly the Soviet Union in January of 1989, while perhaps beaten, was not vanquished. The few people that served in both the Reagan and Bush administrations tend to take a more moderate view of Reagan’s accomplishments. Marlin Fitzwater, White House Press Secretary for both President Reagan and President Bush, felt that Reagan had won the Cold War by 1988, but that the Malta conference on December 2-3, 1990, was the pivotal point in changing the relationship with the Soviet Union and making plans for the post-Cold War world:

I would say that [the Malta conference] was the pivotal point at which the West first recognized that Communism was changing and may collapse. And we met with the purpose of trying to define how that could happen, what our role would be, and how we could help guide the future of whatever Russia emerged…. [the Malta conference] was the point at which we recognized as a

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3 George P. Schultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years As Secretary of State (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), 1131.
country, as a president, that Communism was gone, or on its way. And we were making plans for the post-Cold War world.\textsuperscript{5}

According to this view, although Reagan had accelerated the demise of the Soviet Union, there were still many aspects of the Cold War that had to be addressed before it would completely end. To Fitzwater, Malta was the turning point. Other officials would point to other “turning points” as the date when the Cold War could conclusively be deemed at an end. Bush’s Secretary of State James Baker argues that the Cold War ended on August 2, 1990:

Suddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and Iraq was a big Soviet client state. And I flew back, I happened to be in Mongolia at the time, I flew back through Moscow. And Shevardnadze, without even clearing it with Gorbachev, joined with me in a statement condemning the invasion and calling for an arms embargo of Iraq. Now that was historic. The first time ever, that the Soviet Union foreign minister and the Secretary of State of the United States would ever have a joint press conference condemning the action of a Soviet client state…. That’s the day, at least to me, it was quite clear, if it wasn’t clear the day the wall fell, it was certainly clear that day that the Cold War was over.\textsuperscript{6}

National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft takes a different view. He points to July 15, 1990, as the end:

The point at which I was willing to say the Cold War is over is when Gorbachev in July of 1990 . . . Kohl went over to visit him . . . and Gorbachev said it was alright if a united Germany could belong to NATO. To me that was the end of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{7}

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell was not willing to say that the Cold War was over until December 25, 1991:

The end of the Cold War, I guess for me as a finite date in time was Christmas 1991 when the Soviet Union ended.\textsuperscript{8}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{5} Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.
\textsuperscript{6} James A. Baker III, telephone interview by author, 22 May 2000.
\textsuperscript{7} Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
\textsuperscript{8} Colin Powell, telephone interview by author, 7 August 2000.
\end{flushleft}
How can there exist so much disagreement concerning an end date to the Cold War? How can historians set a date if the very men that lived through the events and made the decisions that shaped the end are in open disagreement? To answer that question, we must examine the Cold War as a whole rather than as a series of isolated events. That requires an examination of the origins of the Cold War. After all, the Cold War could not end until the original issues that set in place the foundation of the Cold War had been resolved.

**Origins of the Cold War**

The origins of the Cold War can be traced back to the Bolshevik revolution in November 1917. The United States, in opposition to communism, was the only great power to refuse to extend diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union. The United States finally relented in 1933; however, both countries largely withdrew from Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, thus preventing any potential confrontations. The military realities of World War II forced the two into an uneasy, and unavoidable, military and political alliance to stop Nazi Germany—a foe that neither the Soviet Union nor the U.S./British forces could defeat independently. With Hitler’s demise seeming increasingly more certain, the one thing that the leaders at the Crimean (Yalta) Conference in February of 1945 agreed upon was that Germany had to surrender unconditionally and that it would be occupied for an undetermined length of time. When the Soviet and U.S. troops met on April 25, 1945, in the center of Germany, it was meant to be a symbol of a joint victory. In reality, it marked a division of Europe that would last for decades. Despite President Roosevelt’s policy of friendship and accommodation toward the USSR that had been adopted during the war effort, the
Soviet Union had used the period of 1942 to 1945 to launch an unrestrained espionage offensive against the United States. Through the Venona intercepts, which were some 2,900 deciphered encrypted Soviet diplomatic communications, the National Security Agency (U.S. Army's Signal Intelligence Service) was able to learn that the Soviet Union was launching an espionage attack of the type that a nation directs against an enemy state. By the late 1940s the evidence provided by Venona of the massive size and intense hostility of Soviet intelligence operations caused both American counterintelligence professionals and high-level policymakers to conclude that Stalin had already launched a covert attack on the United States. Senior Army officers in consultation with the FBI and the CIA decided to keep Venona a secret from the public and even restricted knowledge of it within the government.9 The Soviet espionage offensive would be one of the reasons that the “practice of wartime cooperation did not become a habit that would extend into the postwar era.”10 Evidence of the growing divide would be increasingly apparent as, throughout 1946 and 1947, both sides began to solidify their opposition to the other. Joseph Stalin’s speech in February of 1946, which suggested the existence of a protracted conflict between the communist-based Soviet Union and the capitalist powers, and Winston Churchill’s famous “iron curtain” speech in Fulton, Missouri, in March 1946, heightened the rhetoric of opposing camps. In March 1947, Truman unveiled the Truman Doctrine, which was used to commit the United States to defending Greece and Turkey against communist forces. The announcement of the Marshall Plan in June

10 Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 15.
of 1947, which offered economic aid to Western and Eastern Europe, followed by its rejection by the Soviet Union and its Eastern European states, which were now firmly within the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence, solidified the division of Europe. The authors of the Marshall Plan even recognized before it was offered that it would solidify the division of Europe. During the discussions leading up to the unveiling of the plan, policy advisor George Kennan insisted to George Marshall that the assistance be offered to all of Europe so that “if anyone was to divide the European continent, it should be the Russians, with their response, not we [the United States] with our offer.”11 The Marshall Plan would become the chief instrument of a new foreign policy doctrine that had been suggested by George Kennan—containment. Kennan was credited as the architect of containment policy after publishing an article in the July 1947 issue of Foreign Affairs, under the pseudonym of “X.”12 The concept of containment, however, had been developed by Kennan over the previous two years and presented in various forms, most notably the 8,000 word “long telegram” of February 22, 1946. Simply stated, the idea was to contain the Soviet Union and communism from spreading further in Europe until it decayed from within and brought the Soviets to the bargaining table. Designed to keep the peace while preserving the balance of power, Kennan realized that by 1945 American-Soviet relations had crystallized on three levels: (1) Soviet predominance in most of Eastern Europe could not be avoided, (2) the Soviet Union was ruled by a Communist tyrant and must be contained within its existing and unduly swollen limits, and (3) such a

containment must not only mean an American commitment to the defense of non-
Soviet Europe but also that it would eventually lead to a withdrawal of some of the
most extended positions of Soviet armed presence in Eastern and Central Europe after
which serious discussions about the correction of the division of Europe (including
Germany) should occur. Only the second precept was accepted by the American
government in 1947 and developed into the official containment doctrine employed by
the United States—an incomplete version that ignored Kennan's long-range
considerations and took on more of a military character than Kennan had proposed.
This prompted his resignation from the government in 1953. He felt that the Cold War
that evolved from that point was "a reflection of misunderstandings on both sides of
the intentions of the other side, each ascribing to the other the intention to try to solve
the division of the European continent by military means." In his view, on neither
side were these military fears justified.

Containment doctrine had been meant to address the division of Europe. But
the Cold War's sudden expansion into Asia in 1949-50 demonstrated that World War
II had "left not just a single power vacuum in that part of the world, as in Europe, but
several." The expansion of the Cold War to Asia meant that Americans began to
look at the Cold War in more global terms. Korea and Vietnam would be the sites for
much of the "hot" parts of the Cold War, with soldiers being brought home in body
bags. The second phase of the Cold War moved beyond the division of Europe and
went from the practical, concrete problem seen by George Kennan and into a more

13 George F. Kennan and John Lukacs, George F. Kennan and the Origins of
14 Ibid., 63.
ideological one, pitting Communism against Capitalism, Totalitarianism against Democracy—no matter where they collided.16 The Cold War became much more than just the division of Europe, and Kennan's containment policy began to be used in ways that he had not foreseen. That second phase of the Cold War, the one built on ideology, was the war that Ronald Reagan had fought. That war had been fought with rhetoric—a moral crusade to defeat the Evil Empire and stop the approaching Armageddon. While that might seem like a stretch, it is exactly how Ronald Reagan felt. It was the undercurrent of almost all of his speeches concerning the Soviet Union during his first term in office and indeed the undercurrent of his anti-Communist speeches on behalf of the Screen Actors Guild early in his career. He became more conciliatory during his second term as it became apparent that the United States was winning, and by 1988, the second phase of the Cold War was all but won. But the original phase of the Cold War—the one Kennan had addressed—had not been resolved. The division of Europe still existed. Two armed camps still were entrenched in Europe, exerting their power over their spheres of influence and forcing the other to be ready for an onslaught that would never come. More concerned with ideology and rhetoric, nuclear weapons and Armageddon, Reagan could not see that the division of Europe had to end before the Cold War would be completely finished. In fact, as Jack Matlock recalls, Reagan saw the division of Europe as a symptom not the cause of the Cold War.17 For the 20 years prior to the Reagan administration, the conflict between

15 Gaddis, We Now Know, 54.
the United States and the Soviet Union had been funneled into arms control negotiations—a place where both sides could safely flex their might and use hot rhetoric to demonstrate that the Cold War was a battle between superpowers. Both sides wanted to show that their country, and thus their ideology, was superior. When Brent Scowcroft was given the opportunity to be Bush’s national security advisor, he saw an opportunity to fundamentally change how the Cold War was being fought—to move it from an ideological battle fought with rhetoric to a pragmatic agenda resolved through diplomacy:

I wanted to change that a little and to focus on Eastern Europe. There was ferment in Eastern Europe, especially Poland. And I wanted to take advantage of that ferment to try and get the Soviet army out of Eastern Europe, or at least reduce their presence to allow the Eastern Europeans to develop in a progressive way.18

And that is exactly what the Bush administration accomplished. They both encouraged and helped manage the end of the division of Europe in a way that would help it end with minimal turmoil and minimal bloodshed. Thus, the original phase of the Cold War, and with it the Cold War itself, ended when the division of Europe ended. More precisely, it ended when the center of Europe, where the Soviet and U.S. troops had met in 1945 to symbolize victory, was unified. The reunification of Germany ended the original phase of the Cold War. The official conclusion took place on September 12, 1990, when France, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union, and East and West Germany signed an agreement that ended Allied occupation rights and united Germany, thus fully restoring its sovereignty.19 The practical end, however,

18 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
took place on July 15, 1990, when Gorbachev finally agreed to a unified Germany in NATO, thus clearing the final hurdle for reunification. That reunification, along with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe, and NATO’s shift toward a greater political and less military role, ended the division of Europe and fulfilled the third precept of Kennan’s containment policy.

The argument that there existed in reality two distinct dimensions to the Cold War is the only credible argument that explains the differences in President Reagan’s and President Bush’s foreign policy initiatives, and it is the only one that resolves the original suggestions made by Kennan concerning containment. It also explains why Kennan became one of the more vocal critics of how the government was putting the Containment Doctrine into practice. In 1966, Kennan argued against the war in Vietnam on grounds of American self-interest. To him, the Cold War was a practical concern that need not evolve into the United States fighting communism in every part of the globe. It was not in America’s self-interest to fight a military war to end communism. The Soviet Union had no intention, as the American military establishment feared immediately following the Second World War, to conquer Western Europe and establish subservient Communist regimes. He understood the willingness of the government and the military to accept this image because it would give the military “a new purpose, a new function, even in a sense a new legitimacy, to the greatly swollen military bureaucratic establishment with which the end of the war

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had left us.”21 The suspicions on the Soviet’s part, contends Kennan, were confirmed by “the entire trend of American policy in the immediate postwar years.”22 The unwillingness of the United States to pursue any realistic discussions, discussions advocated by Kennan, about the future of Europe added to the fact that the United States intended to rearm the West Germans and admit them to NATO, events that convinced the already oversuspicious Stalin that the West was determined to steal the spoils that he had won in World War II. Kennan argues that Stalin failed to realize that the members of the NATO alliance were not adequately prepared or unified enough to mobilize in an attack on the Soviet Union. On the other side, the Americans had no reason to justify their belief that the Soviets were preparing an onslaught against the rest of Europe. A Soviet victory would involve the unification of Germany under a single Communist government—something Stalin did not want. Moving the center of European Communism to a united Germany would have been dangerous because such a powerful regime would not remain a puppet of Moscow for long and could eventually challenge the Russian Communist regime for superiority. Thus, from a practical standpoint, the situation that solidified in the opening years of the Cold War, at least according to Kennan, was absurd. He particularly disagreed with how the problem of Soviet power was treated in NSC-68, a document that formed the basis of postwar American foreign policy.23

Between 1945 and 1950, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union had greatly deteriorated and had become increasingly hostile. The contest,

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22 Ibid., 64.
however, had been fought largely on political and economic grounds. During this time, foreign policy had stressed economic assistance through the Marshall Plan and collective security through the North Atlantic Treaty and a program of very modest military aid to its allies. That changed when NSC-68 argued that the West needed large, ready military forces to stop the expansion of communism and the Soviet Union. President Truman’s budget of 1950, the year NSC-68 was drafted, called for spending less than $13 billion for the military—less than 5 percent of the gross national product (GNP). The next year, after NSC-68 was officially adopted, Truman requested more than $60 billion for the military—18.5 percent of a robust GNP. Military power would continue to have primary claim on U.S. resources throughout the Cold War period as the militarization of the Cold War began in earnest with NSC-68, presented to Truman in April of 1950, and, just two months later, the Korean War. NSC-68 had presented four possible courses of action to Truman: (1) continuation of current policies, (2) isolation, (3) war, (4) and “a more rapid building up of the political, economic, and military strength of the free world than provided under [option number one], with the purpose of reaching, if possible, a tolerable state of order among nations without war and of preparing to defend ourselves in the event that the free world is attacked.” The study strongly recommended that Truman pursue option number four. Just as Kennan’s famous “X” article, the Truman Doctrine, and the Marshall Plan marked a turning point in 1947 and provided the basis for the Cold War based on a

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23 Ibid., 70.
political and economic struggle, 1950 witnessed the Korean War and NSC-68 providing the example and rationale, respectively, for U.S. strategy during much of the Cold War. It was not by coincidence that NSC-68 was formulated immediately after Kennan stepped down as the director of the Policy Planning Staff and Paul Nitze assumed the position. Kennan, who saw the international confrontation as essentially political in nature and thus necessitating a political response, would not have recommended to President Truman a military solution. Indeed Kennan would spend a good part of the rest of his career voicing his disagreement to the treatment of the problem of Soviet power in NSC-68, warning that:

"History shows that belief in the inevitability of war with a given power affects behavior in such a way as to cripple all constructive policy approaches towards that power, leaves the field open for military compulsions, and thus easily takes on the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy."  

But, Nitze felt that the report answered the fundamental question of national security: How do we get from where we are to where we want to be without being struck by disaster along the way? Nitze and Kennan disagreed on both where they were and where they wanted to be. Aside from Kennan's disdain for the militarization of the Cold War, there was a more fundamental disagreement. Both NSC-68 and Kennan viewed American security as being dependent upon the maintenance of a balance of power. But NSC-68 argued that the balance of power was very fragile and could shift at any moment. Kennan believed that there were only five real centers of power—the

industrial complexes of the United States, Great Britain, the Rhine valley, the Soviet Union, and Japan. As long as the West maintained control of four out of those five, no threat to the international order would exist. Kennan saw a very tangible struggle based primarily on geography and economic capacity. NSC-68 suggested that changes in the balance of power could result from intangibles such as intimidation, humiliation, and loss of credibility. Within the argument for pursuing the fourth option, the authors of NSC-68 cited an important advantage as being its "psychological impact." Historian John Lewis Gaddis explains the impact of such a line of reasoning:

The implications were startling. World order, and with it American security, had come to depend as much on the perception of the balance of power as on what that balance actually was. And the perceptions involved were not just those of statesmen customarily charged with conducting international affairs; they reflected as well mass opinion, foreign as well as domestic, informed as well as uniformed, rational as well as irrational. Before such an audience, even the appearance of a shift in power relationships could have unnerving consequences; judgments based on such traditional criteria as geography, economic capacity, or military potential now had to be balanced against considerations of image, prestige, and credibility. The effect was to vastly increase the number and variety of interests deemed relevant to the national security, and to blur distinctions between them.

These proliferating interests would have to be defended by an increase in defense expenditures. This completely went against the perception of limited resources, which had been one of the underpinnings of Kennan's views on containment. Instead, there was not to be any distinction between peripheral and vital interests. Indeed, if

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27 Paul H. Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), 95.
American security depended as much on perception of the balance of power as on what that balance actually was, all interests were vital. NSC-68 suggested:

...a way to increase defense expenditures without war, without long-term budget deficits, and without crushing tax burdens: if, as Truman’s domestic economic advisors had argued, the administration would learn to live with temporarily unbalanced budgets in the interests of stimulating the economy, then the means of defense could be expanded as necessary to protect the American position in the world.30

The debate over NSC-68 implied that the country could achieve expandable means if a threat to its survival existed. Clearly, NSC-68 recognized such a threat. The comparisons between this approach and Reagan’s “Peace through Strength” program are obvious, as are the comparison of Kennan’s approach based on limited resources and Bush’s approach amid huge deficits and a weak economy. Another comparison can be made between NSC-68’s view of American security based on perception and Reagan’s fight against the “Evil Empire,” which was based on rhetoric and ideology. Certainly, Kennan’s emphasis on geography and economic capacity has direct correlation with Bush’s emphasis on Eastern Europe. It seems clear, at least in light of this study, that there was a marked difference between the policies of 1947 and 1950; between the policies of 1981 and 1989.

The hypothesis of two distinct levels of the Cold War can not only be seen in the writings of George Kennan and Paul Nitze but also in the words of official who where there when the Cold War ended. Take, for example, the words of Marlin Fitzwater, who served as Press Secretary to both Reagan and Bush:

30 Ibid., 166.
When Reagan came [into office] in 1988, we were in the heat of the Cold War, and Reagan was the Cold Warrior. He knew how to fight communism. He had a strong ideology, a strong belief in America, and so he was a perfect president to take ‘em on and say America’s going to win this war. And when President Bush came in he had the international background and the diplomatic experience to then negotiate the new realities of an East-West relationship.31

He identified Reagan’s fight, and his strength, as being based on ideology. He was “the Cold Warrior” because he “knew how to fight Communism”—with ideology. This ideology was manifested in rhetoric. Fitzwater identifies Reagan as the perfect president to take them on and “say [emphasis added] America’s going to win this war.” When Fitzwater refers to Bush, he praises him for his international background and diplomatic experience. Bush was the right president to “negotiate [emphasis added] the new realities of an East-West relationship.” In that same interview, Fitzwater indirectly refers to Bush’s ability to “navigate [emphasis added] the waters of European change.” The difference in terminology could not be more striking.

Reagan is going to “fight communism,” “take ‘em on,” and “say America’s going to win.” Bush is going to use his “diplomatic experience” to “negotiate” and “navigate.” The two presidents were addressing the Cold War in two distinct ways. That is because they were fighting two different levels of the Cold War, partly because of their two markedly different backgrounds and partly because of the circumstances in which they found themselves:

The point is that the world changed there and it changed just about the time we changed presidents, so you can’t really judge President Bush, his views on ending the Cold War, against Reagan’s because the Cold War was different when he became president.32

31 Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.
32 Ibid.
It is difficult to compare the effectiveness of the foreign policy approach of each man because they had such different goals and such different concepts of the war that they were fighting. Reagan put his belief in words, words such as *freedom* and *democracy*. He felt that espousing those words was a goal in itself. If he could get people, Americans and Soviets, to believe in those words, successful policies would naturally follow. In essence, he used ideology as both a guide for policymaking and as a tool to justify policy once it was made. In his memoir, Reagan explains the essence of what the Cold War meant to him:

> Democracy triumphed in the Cold War because it was a battle of values—between one system that gave preeminence to the state and another that gave preeminence to the individual and freedom.33

To Reagan, the Cold War was a battle of ideology and values that had been won once it was demonstrated that democracy was superior. Indeed Jack F. Matlock Jr., who served on Reagan’s National Security Council staff from 1983-86 and as U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union under both Reagan and Bush, confirms that Reagan viewed the Cold War as a war of ideology: totalitarianism versus freedom.34 Matlock distinguishes between the ideological phase of the Cold War and the diplomatic phase. He points to Gorbachev’s speech before the United Nations as the point at which the Cold War philosophically came to an end:

> I distinguish between the ideological end to the Cold War and, as I say, all of the cleanup diplomacy, which was important. It’s sort of like something happening as the end of a crisis, but you don’t know if there’s going to be a relapse if you’re speaking in medical terms. So it had to be confirmed, but it was confirmed over the next two years.... So I think that, in general, we no longer had totally antagonistic goals. After all, the Cold War was conceived as


a zero-sum game—any gain for one was [a loss for] the other—and then suddenly we were looking at how we can disengage, how can we serve the interests of everybody.... that’s why I say I think it ended ideologically. That’s not to deny that there was a lot of diplomacy to be done to clear up the remnants of the Cold War, the results.\(^\text{35}\)

According to this view, when President Bush took office, the United States needed a skillful diplomat who excelled at personal diplomacy and could help “wrap things up” peacefully—what Matlock refers to as cleanup diplomacy. Although the Cold War’s back had been broken in terms of ideology, the responsibility for cleaning up the remnants of the Cold War would fall on Bush. It was a role that Bush, who was wary of excessive rhetoric and preferred pragmatic (he would say “prudent”) diplomatic solutions, was well suited to perform. That is certainly the view of Brent Scowcroft:

The Carter administration . . . well, they had a tough time. But in a way it was sort of a disaster because everything was going wrong for us and it was the end of Vietnam and Watergate, and the Soviet Union was talking about the correlation of forces and the world was changing in their favor and so on. So what we needed was Reagan to restore American spirits and to have us stand up and stand up tall. But it took Bush to bring it to an end.\(^\text{36}\)

Scowcroft certainly felt that Bush ended the Cold War:

The Cold War . . . well, you know the Reagan administration tends to think they ended the Cold War. I think the Cold War was not at all ended when Bush came into office. Eastern Europe was still divided just like it was before. The Soviet army was still manning barricades and so on. No, it happened under President Bush, and it happened the way it did in considerable part because of his great skill at diplomacy about eliciting cooperation from people, both friends and opponents.\(^\text{37}\)

Notice what Scowcroft points to as the reason the Cold War had not ended—Eastern Europe was still divided:

\(^{35}\) Jack F. Matlock, Jr., interview by author, Boston, Massachusetts, 6 January 2001.
\(^{36}\) Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
\(^{37}\) Ibid.
I thought that . . . the Cold War was really about Eastern Europe. And, with the unification of Germany and its membership in NATO, that really finished the Cold War.  

The division of Europe that Kennan had addressed with his Containment Doctrine had to end before the Cold War could be over. However, the division of Europe could not end, at least peacefully, until the Soviet Union allowed for that division to end.

Gorbachev and the “new thinkers” who gained power in 1985 provided the initial conditions needed for the end of the Cold War. But he did not intend to end the division of Europe: he was more interested in internal change. Changes in foreign policy were merely designed to help *perestroika* succeed. Gorbachev looked favorably on world developments that he felt promoted *perestroika* and never considered that they might lead to the emergence of anti-communist and anti-Soviet governments: “If we can bring people back into the socialist system instead of alienating them, we can give socialism a second wind.”  

This optimistic remark in July of 1989 demonstrated that the purpose of his policies was not to promote separation or grant independence. Instead, they were intended to “inspire much-needed reform and modernization.” His belief that socialism would be strengthened depended on his ability to revitalize the Soviet Union. Gorbachev’s domestic reforms, however, could not revive an economy beleaguered by mismanagement and inefficiency. With falling agricultural and industrial production, inflation, and increased foreign debt and trade deficits, criticism of Gorbachev’s reform efforts led to demands for local autonomy by many of the more

38 Ibid.
than 100 different nationalities within the Soviet Union. Gorbachev’s reforming activities and his denunciation of Brezhnev’s “years of stagnation” did not merely impact the Soviet Union. The rising expectations sparked by glasnost (open debate on government policies) and perestroika (economic restructuring) led to movements in the satellite states for the same type of fundamental reforms and, thereby, challenged the power and authority of the local communist bosses. This progression of change from ‘below’ followed the path that Gorbachev was taking from ‘above.’ As Jack Matlock recalls, Gorbachev’s initial foreign policy approach was that of a dogmatic defender of traditional nationalistic, exclusive, and intolerant Soviet attitudes. But within just a few years he had rejected the class struggle ideology and embraced universal human values. Gorbachev knew that a less confrontational foreign policy would allow him to lower defense spending, thus freeing up needed resources for internal economic reform. Also, Soviet leaders had used the Cold War to justify internal repression. Gorbachev knew that the needed reforms might be blocked by hard-liners as long as the Cold War continued. In addition, continuing a confrontational security policy would make it imperative that the coercive control of Eastern Europe be maintained—something Gorbachev increasingly began to view as incompatible with his policies of democratization and economic reform within the Soviet Union.\footnote{David S. Painter, \textit{The Cold War: An International History} (London: Routledge,}

\addcontentsline{toc}{section}{References}
for the Soviet Union could become available. Gorbachev’s change in foreign policy
was also done to help his country overcome “the hostility, and permanent tension with
the outside world that the Bolshevik Revolution had engendered.”

Gorbachev knew
that, in order for his efforts to succeed, he was going to need better relations with the
West. This change in relations started during Reagan’s second term and was nearly
complete by the time Bush assumed the presidency. Gorbachev recognized that
between his last visit to the United States while Reagan was still in office and the first
visit under President Bush, “the ‘enemy image,’ used to fuel the Cold War
confrontation for decades, had lost much of its appeal.”

Gorbachev’s ideological
pronouncements were more than a shift in rhetoric; they led to the reorientation of
Soviet foreign policy to conform to them. That is why Gorbachev, unlike previous
Soviet leaders, consistently used force not as a first but as a last resort. That is why,
in the end, he was willing to agree to arms reductions based on equality rather than
along proportional lines, which would have maintained Soviet superiority. That is why
he took a non-interventionist policy toward Eastern Europe and allowed those
countries to leave the Soviet sphere of influence; why he allowed a unified Germany
in NATO and opposed aggression by a former Soviet client state in the Persian Gulf. It
is worth remembering that the Bush administration had its best success in negotiations,

42 Jack F. Matlock, Jr., Autopsy on An Empire: The American Ambassador’s Account
43 Mikhail Gorbachev, Memoirs: Mikhail Gorbachev (New York: Doubleday, 1996),
536.
44 Unlike his non-interventionist policy towards Eastern Europe, Gorbachev was
prepared to use armed force to maintain the Soviet Union itself. But, again, only as a
last resort.
for example Gorbachev's agreement for a unified Germany, when the discussion was
couched in the rhetoric of universal human values. As Matlock concludes:

He [Gorbachev] did not originate the specific program that eventually ended
the Cold War and eliminated the East-West divide. But he came to understand
that the Soviet Union could benefit from joining the rest of the world, and he
made an essential contribution when he found and adopted an ideological
justification for making peace with the world.43

Thus, Bush dealt with a Soviet leader with no clear strategic vision, but one that
eagerly wanted his internal reforms to succeed. The task was to find common interests
that could move forward the U.S. objective of ending the division of Europe and aid
Gorbachev in his task of preserving and developing the democratic transformations
that were occurring within the Soviet Union.

**Conclusion**

Foreign relations are a major concern of every presidency. This was especially
ture in the presidency of George Bush, during which the Cold War ended, Germany
was reunited, the Soviet Union collapsed and the former Soviet Bloc countries began
the transition to democracy and market economics, and the United States led the
alliance that liberated Kuwait from Iraqi control. In no other area does the president
play more of a central role than in foreign affairs. This is especially true when, as in
the case of Bush, both houses of Congress are controlled by the opposing party. The
concept of George Bush as an excellent president with regards to foreign policy and a
poor president in regards to domestic policy seems to have been universally accepted.
In fact, it is now almost a cliché. It is worth noting that out of all of the Bush
administration officials interviewed for this study, when asked to list the achievements

of the Bush administration, not one cited a domestic policy achievement. All exclusively focused on accomplishments in foreign affairs. The press were quick to see this disparity and focused on it throughout the Bush presidency. At the end of 1990, *Time* magazine named its "Man of the Year." The award was supposed to go to the person who, for better or for worse, had made the most impact on news that year. Their selection was unusual in that they named "the two George Bushes" as "Men of the Year." They claimed that George Bush had seemed like two presidents: one displaying a commanding vision of a new world order; the other showing little vision for his country. In short, they were making a distinction between a remarkably successful "International George Bush" and a rudderless "Domestic George Bush."

This perception was not confined to 1990 nor was it limited to *Time* magazine. In fact, this is the image that most of the general public, and many trained observers and historians, have of George Bush's entire presidency. Economist Robert Reich mockingly labeled Bush the "best secretary of state we've ever had." Economist John Kenneth Galbraith added that, in his opinion, "[Bush] becomes slightly depressed when he has to come home and deal with economic or other dreary subjects of that sort." Bush did have some limited success on domestic policy such as passage of a clean air bill, legislation to help the handicap, an improved immigration bill, and efforts to bail out the savings-and-loans. But then-Senator Al Gore seems to have summed up the prevailing opinion when he labeled Bush a "do nothing president on

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48 Ibid.
domestic problems." It is not unusual for a president who was in office during a war, indeed Bush had to deal with both the Cold War and the Persian Gulf War, to be remembered primarily in conjunction with that war. But Bush is one of the few who is remembered only in relation to the wars that he fought. If not for the victories in two wars, the assumption is that Bush would have been a rather forgettable president or remembered only as the man entrusted with the Reagan legacy. Such a hypothesis attempts to separate Bush from his historical context and judge him apart from the events that confronted his presidency. Such an effort would be foolish. The success of a president depends largely on the crises that confront him. How he deals with the situation in which he has been placed determines how he should be remembered.

George Bush was president at a time when the United States needed a capable foreign policy leader. Bush’s accomplishments must be seen as the culmination of his long career in foreign affairs and national security policy. His tenure as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, envoy to China, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and vice president of the United States uniquely prepared him to be an excellent foreign policy president. Even apart from the shadow of Reagan, Bush was highly qualified to assume the presidency when it was apparent that the Cold War was coming to a conclusion. And it was logical in 1992, with the end of the Cold War and foreign policy expertise not needed as much as domestic policy experience, that George Bush would lose the presidency. And it is within the context of historical events that Bush should be judged. That does not mean that Bush should be hailed as having masterminded the end of the Cold War. Indeed, Bush received substantial criticism at

49 Ibid.
the beginning of his administration for inaction, and many of the decisions made in
1989 in particular were reactionary in nature. But just as American foreign policy
from 1947 to 1950 was not merely a working out of a clearly delineated Doctrine of
Containment, Bush did not chart a clear course of action. Both Truman, with the help
of men such as Kennan and Marshall, and Bush, with Scowcroft and Baker, decided
upon the major elements of an American response to the Soviet Union in a piecemeal
and staggered manner.30 The events in 1989 in particular were so unpredictable that
any precisely laid out plan would have to be continually altered. According to Brent
Scowcroft, Bush, with his strong background in foreign affairs, excelled in this sort of
ad hoc policymaking:

   He was not a great strategist, but he had wonderful instincts and he wanted to
move out and get things done. And so when you’d give him an idea, if it was a
good one, he was ready to charge off on it, and did frequently.51

In fact, one of Bush’s strengths, as Scowcroft recalls, was his ability to recognize and
then guide the effects of the historic events that occurred during his presidency:

   President Bush recognized historic change was taking place. He didn’t create
the change. But what he did is manage it in a way that these really cataclysmic
changes in the world structure took place without a shot being fired.52

Bush led a transition: a transition from the Cold War to a post-Cold War world. Bush
recognized practical diplomatic problems and addressed them with practical
diplomatic solutions. Marlin Fitzwater argues that Bush should get credit for that
transition:

50 For a detailed description of foreign policymaking between 1947 and 1950 see
Wilson D. Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign
51 Brent Scowcroft, telephone interview by author, 23 May 2000.
52 Ibid.
Bush should get credit for transitioning, for understanding the relationships of the country, for having a geo-political view of the world that allowed him to work cooperatively with Gorbachev and with Kohl and with Mitterand in France and with John Major in Great Britain in a very cooperative way in shaping that year or two where Germany was reunited and the Soviet Union was trying to sort itself out.53

And he was responsible for it ending it peacefully. The Cold War did not have to end peacefully. General Colin Powell, who served under both Bush and Reagan, explains Bush’s foreign policy legacy:

He [Bush] is the one who guided the Cold War to its end, and he did it with great skill. The unification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet Union without us gloating about it was very wisely done by the president, certain magnanimity in the manner in which he dealt with Gorbachev and then Yeltsin, and I think he played a key role at the end.54

It was Bush’s adroit management—diplomatic and political management—that allowed for a peaceful transition. The Bush presidency had many faults—especially with the domestic agenda and the inattention to the ceremonial aspect of the presidency—but its one great strength allowed for the division of Europe to finally be resolved and for the Cold War to end with a whimper and not a bang.

53 Marlin Fitzwater, telephone interview by author, 9 May 2000.
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-Appendix A-
Marlin Fitzwater Interview

I spoke with Marlin Fitzwater via telephone from his home in Deale, Maryland, on May 9, 2000. Fitzwater served as White House press secretary from 1982 to 1992 under both Ronald Reagan and George Bush.

How would you contrast the differences between President Reagan and President Bush as far as their ability to deal with the media?

Well, they were both very effective but in totally different ways. President Reagan pretty much ignored the media in a personal sense. He read the press a lot and, of course, was very sensitive to what was being portrayed on television, but he seldom took it personal. And he tended to conduct his press relations in the same way. He held 48 press conferences in eight years. He tended to use press conferences to speak directly to the American people on issues, and generally conducted his press relations through formal kinds of meetings like the press conference. President Bush, on the other hand, knew all the reporters. They had covered him during eight years as vice president before being president. He tended to interact with them personally. He gave 240 press conferences in four years, and he appeared in the press briefing room often, sometimes even two or three times a day. So he was much more interactive with the press on an individual basis.

Did you as press secretary have to make any adjustments when say working for President Reagan or working for President Bush?

Well, yes. At the end of the Reagan administration, President Bush asked me to be his press secretary. And we sat down and had a talk about how he wanted to conduct his press relations. And that was my advice to him that he was good with the press, he should be more personal in his relationships, hold more press conferences, talk to them on a regular basis so there wasn’t this huge build up for press conferences every month.

And when he was gearing up for the 1988 election, what steps did he take to try to establish his own image separate from Reagan?

Well, now that, see I wasn’t involved. I was President Reagan’s press secretary through ’88. So, I don’t really know.

Did the Reagan administration, during the 1988 election, make a conscious effort to try to stay out of the campaign so Bush could form his own identity?
No, we made a conscience effort to stay in the campaign. One of the reasons was that President Bush was not trying to create a separate identity. I mean, he was to a small degree, but his challenge was to show that his policies were the same as Ronald Reagan's because they had worked together for a long time, and they were both conservatives. People wanted to know if he was going to be loyal to the Bush, I mean, Reagan policies. And the press were always trying to drive a wedge between he and President Reagan. So it's just the opposite of what we have today. Today, Gore is trying to get away from Clinton. But in the Bush-Reagan period the question was could they stay together, and the press was always trying to find differences on tax issues particularly. And, so that was the different challenge.

Do you think that the interview that Bush had with Dan Rather during the 1988 election helped him overcome the press charges of the wimp label or do you think that hurt him in the long run by focusing more attention on the Iran-Contra Affair?

Oh, I think it helped him considerably. I don’t recall any fallout on Iran-Contra because it didn’t have anything to do with the substance of that matter. But the confrontation itself was helpful because simply it did kind of have a symbolic manhood effect if you will. Dan Rather came out of it looking really bad. He was angry and felt he'd been humiliated and so forth. So I think on the whole it was very helpful for President Bush and the campaign. In the long term, it hurt his relationship with CBS, and that was always a difficult relationship from then on through his presidency. But the immediate effect was definitely good for President Bush and bad for Dan Rather.

Once Bush became president, what steps were taken as far as style to distance him from Reagan? Did he try to lower expectations once he became president?

Well, I don’t know about lowering expectations, but as I’d described the differences in their press relationship, and that was the most obvious one was that President Bush was just always available to talk to the press. And he would talk to them at meetings and during photo ops, in the driveway and so forth, which was a lot more open kind of personal relationship than Reagan had. That was the most dramatic kind of effect. I don’t know that he tried to change relationships and that sort of thing. President Bush wasn’t much for PR strategies. If you tried to take him some strategy on say, well, let’s raise our profile or lower expectations or something, his view was that that was pretty much phony and it was best that you just do your job and things will work out. That wasn’t always true, but he hoped it was.

What problems were created with the press by the foreign policy review at the beginning of President Bush’s presidency?

Well, yes, because, of course, the press is always an impatient group. I mean, a day is forever in the news business. And you promise a policy review and they expect to
have it tomorrow or the next day. And if it drags on for six or eight months, something like that, that seems like a long time and you’ve got to expect you’re going to start getting editorials and others saying, “Where’s that policy review?” So, you always have to deal with media impatience.

*When the foreign policy review was complete, it was revealed in a series of speeches. What was the reasoning behind that and why were they not televised?*

No, they weren’t nationally televised. Well, the problem was, first of all, we had to have some way to put it out. And secondly, the review that took place was a more informal one between the president, the national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, Secretary of State Baker, Secretary of Defense Cheney, and so it was, ya know, it didn’t lend itself to kind of being published in a book. This review really was, amounted to a lot of private discussion, a lot of meetings they had had and so forth. So they needed some way to kind of say to the American people, “Here’s what my policies are going to be.” And the speeches simply were a, seemed to be, the most effective tool for producing three or four documents on three or four different areas of foreign policy that outlined where he intended to go from here.

*Reagan used the media to help shape our relationship with the Soviet Union. What was Bush’s strategy as far as utilizing the press to shape foreign policy? Did he use the press like Reagan did?*

Well, not so much. First of all, the relationship was different. President Reagan used the media very effectively in holding up a spotlight on Communism. He criticized them in his speeches. When we went to Moscow in 1987, he made the walk in Red Square, which was the symbolic way of showing a new relationship with the Soviet Union. Then he went to an orthodox church to show, to highlight freedom of religion, and then he went to Moscow State University to highlight freedom of speech and education. Then we met with dissidents and had some dissidents come over to the U.S. embassy, again as a symbolic way of highlighting freedom of speech and movement. So Reagan used the media and used symbolic events very dramatically to highlight the Cold War fight between democracy and Communism. By the time President Bush came into office, Communism was in its last throws if you will. And the question was not so much, in 1989, how does democracy defeat Communism; the question was how does democracy help communism go away in a peaceful way that maintains some semblance of civility and peace and so forth within the country. And how do we help guide what was going on in the Soviet Union.

*So by the time Bush became president, he, instead of using the grand, symbolic gestures to the media, he would need to use more personal diplomacy, correct?*

More personal diplomacy and direct policy help. So President Bush’s first meeting with Gorbachev as president was in Malta in the shipboard meeting. And the first thing President Bush said was, in the meeting, “Before we even start, I would like to
open the meeting with a statement.” And in that statement he presented Gorbachev with a seventeen-point economic plan for helping them transition into this new kind of perestroika world that Gorbachev was defining. And it cleared a pathway to get access to the World Bank and the international monetary fund, included changes to the Jackson-Vanik trade bill to increase trade activity, and a number of other points. But that was really the first kind of direct support that America gave the Soviet Union—ever. But that was an entirely different kind of approach, of course, than President Reagan had had when we were fighting more the ideology—the differences of the two countries.

Speaking of negotiations—when Reagan was negotiating with Gorbachev, he really used SDI to bring him to the bargaining table, correct?

Right.

Did Bush back off of SDI and not push it as much with Gorbachev?

No, he did, and in all the summit meetings I was in with Reagan and Gorbachev, everyone of them ended in the Soviet Union’s plea toward getting us to drop SDI. That was the objective, and the reason was because they always thought it was an offensive system. President Reagan presented it as a defensive shield, but they always thought we were going to get up in space, build some platform, and then launch a nuclear attack on Russia. And their problem was that they felt they couldn’t afford to match it. And so, they knew... that’s when they started getting serious about arms reduction. Their view was, we don’t have the money to ever build a space-based system; let’s get out of the arms race. So they started reducing nuclear weapons. President Bush kept the pressure on in the same way when he met with Gorbachev and then with Yeltsin, after Yeltsin replaced him in ’90, their goal was still the same. They still focused every meeting on how to get us to back out of SDI. So President Bush wanted to hold that pressure point out there all through his four years as well.

Was Malta seen as the pivotal point in the change in the relationship with the Soviet Union, going from the symbolic, more confrontational time of Reagan, and now Bush working to try to help improve the relationship through specific programs?

No question in my mind. I would define that a little differently though. I would say that that was the pivotal point at which the West first recognized that Communism was changing and may collapse. And we met with the purpose of trying to define how that could happen, what our role would be, and how we could help guide the future of whatever Russia emerged. And so it didn’t have so much to do with... basically Reagan had won the Cold War by 1988, especially as we look back on it. At the time it wasn’t quite so clear, but it was clear. And I remember a memo from General Scowcroft to President Bush, which I’m pretty sure that all of this is in Bush’s book Looking Forward, but in any case, I remember a memo from Scowcroft, and I talk
about it in my book *Call the Briefing!* that for Malta they laid out three different scenarios of what might happen in the Soviet Union. And one was that Gorbachev was killed or thrown out of office by hard-line Communists. The other was that Gorbachev did actually change things but it created so much chaos and corruption that the whole country fell apart. Another one was that it kind of worked moderately well—they changed the politics and so forth, but the economy slipped away, and he would be eventually replaced by somebody else who might be able to run the country. But the point is not how well those three scenarios reflected what actually happened, but the point is that that memo indicated that that was the point at which we recognized as a country, as a president, that Communism was gone or on its way and were making plans for the post-Cold War world. And certainly then the whole economic assistance was a post-Cold War situation even though there were still a lot of uncertainties.

Bush faced a great deal of criticism over his reaction to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Was he less concerned with his image and more concerned with ending the Cold War and tying up all the loose ends as far as not wanting to “rub it in” to the Soviet Union?

First of all, he didn’t give a damn about his image. And I specifically raised it ‘cause I went to him and said, you know, the wall is coming down and you need to say something here that’s going to be strong and show that the president recognizes what’s happening and it’d be good for your image and so forth. And he said to me he didn’t care about image. That this was not a time to be worrying about that sort of thing. And that he wanted to respond in a way that Gorbachev would understand and that would be supportive of moving ahead in the future relationship. I mean, it’s one of Bush’s more admirable traits in the sense that he had enormous discipline in order to do what he thought was right for the country even at the personal risk of bad press and bad publicity and image consideration. And he wouldn’t do it. But it paid off, and when we went to Malta and they sat down at the table and one of the early things he said was, “I hope you noticed” . . . maybe it wasn’t Malta. It was the first meeting after the wall fell anyway, and he said to Gorbachev, “I hope you noticed that I didn’t dance on the wall when it came down.” And Gorbachev said, “I did and I appreciate it very much.” And they talked then about the language that they would use to describe the new relationship in a post-Berlin Wall situation.

And did that help smooth over with Gorbachev the idea of a unified Germany?

It did. It was very helpful. And what it showed was that the United States and Germany, again, were more interested in building real relationships and moving the process forward then they were just taking credit for winning the Cold War.

Because of his symbolic gestures and his media presence during the end of the Cold War, Reagan gets a lot of credit for ending the Cold War. Do you think that a distorted image exists concerning Bush’s accomplishments because he cared more about actual policy-making decisions than his media image?
No, I don’t. I think President Bush gets a lot of credit for the transition to, over the end of the Cold War and moving into the new relationship. The point is that the world changed there and it changed just about the time we changed presidents, so you can’t really judge President Bush, his views on ending the Cold War, against Reagan’s because the Cold War was different when he became president. And so I think President Bush has gotten pretty good credit for, again for transitioning, for understanding the relationships of the country, for having a geopolitical view of the world that allowed him to work cooperatively with Gorbachev and with Kohl and with Mitterand in France and with John Major in Great Britain in a very cooperative way in shaping that year or two where Germany was reunited and the Soviet Union was trying to sort itself out. Maybe one of the best examples was when Yeltsin replaced Gorbachev after the coup attempt. It was President Bush who got on the phone to Yeltsin and convinced him that in a peaceful turnover, he needed to be good to Gorbachev. And told him to give him a car, give him a house, and treat him well. And Yeltsin didn’t want to do it because he hated Gorbachev, and then Bush called up Gorbachev and said the same thing—You want to demonstrate a peaceful transition; you got to be praising Yeltsin or at least don’t be criticizing him in public. Don’t be tearing him down and picking a fight. You two guys have got to show that you can change power peacefully. And that’s the hallmark of that period for President Bush.

You just spoke of Bush’s relationships with foreign leaders. During my research I found that Bush spent a great deal of time trying to establish personal relationships with foreign leaders. Was that different than Reagan? Did Bush spend more time in communication and correspondence with foreign leaders and in establishing relationships?

Yes, and there are two or three reasons for that. One is that he had long had an interest in foreign policy and had been a student of foreign policy in a way that President Reagan hadn’t as governor. President Bush, as you recall, by the time he had been president had already been envoy to China, ambassador to the United Nations, and director of the CIA. All three of those are major kinds of diplomatic foreign policy jobs. And they are ones at which he came to know the heads of state of many countries around the world So he just brings about a much different background to the job at that time. I think he was ideally suited to the changes in the world affairs, that we’re lucky we didn’t have a president come in in ’88, well, like Dukakis, who was a governor with no foreign policy experience. I think he would have had a lot of trouble navigating the waters of European change.

So you’re saying that Reagan came in at the right time because at that point we needed the grand symbolic gestures. But when Bush came in, foreign policy expertise was needed to tie up all of the loose ends of the Cold War.

No, what I’m saying is that when Reagan came in in 1988, we were in the heat of the Cold War, and Reagan was the Cold Warrior. He knew how to fight communism. He
had a strong ideology, a strong belief in America, and so he was a perfect president to take 'em on and say America’s going to win this war. And when President Bush came in he had the international background and the diplomatic experience to then negotiate the new realities of an East-West relationship. I think it goes to the very substance of world affairs at those times.

Thank you.

BAKER: I’ll be happy to talk to you, but my book will go into a heck of a lot more detail than what I can tell you in a 20-minute conversation on the phone. And it tells you a lot about President Bush’s role in managing the end of the Cold War. What I basically say there is that he did a superb job of seeing to it that the Cold War ended with a whimper and not with a bang. It’s called Politics of Diplomacy. It was published by Putnam and Company, Putnam and Sons. I got it out in about September of ’95. It’s hard to find, but if you look for it, you can find it. It’ll give you a lot more than I can give you over the phone. Secondly, if you haven’t done it, you ought to also read At the Highest Levels.

Yes, sir, I’ve read that book.

OK, good. Well, go ahead and shoot.

As the campaign manager during the fight for the 1980 Republican nomination, would you point to the debate in Nashua, New Hampshire, as the turning point of that nomination?

I think probably it was one turning point. I think it would have been very difficult for an unknown like George Bush, someone who was not known at all nationally—even after Iowa—to upset Ronald Reagan who had almost knocked off an incumbent president for the nomination in ’76. He came very close to knocking off Gerry Ford. And people don’t remember this but Governor Reagan started running for president in 1968. So I think that it would have been very tough for Bush to win in any event, but conceivable, and the Nashua debate was critical.

And once he lost that early momentum during the debate, it was pretty much over from that point?

Well, it was except that, you know, we won a lot of delegates and the reason he was put on the ticket . . . Reagan didn’t want to put him on the ticket because they’d had a fairly contentious primary, and Bush lasted through Michigan and Pennsylvania, well into May. He didn’t have to get out of the race until sometime in the first or second week in May, and he had a lot of delegates at the national convention. And, if you recall, in Detroit, Reagan tried to go to Ford and that never worked out. He really
didn't want to do Bush but then when that collapsed, when the Ford effort collapsed, there wasn't anywhere to go except to Bush because he had delegates.

What was the main goal behind the lengthy foreign policy review at the beginning of Bush’s term in office?

Well, any new administration, even if it’s one of the same party, has got to put its imprint on foreign policy, and you needed to have a Bush imprint on the nation’s foreign policy. Also, you needed to make sure that there had not been an overly aggressive effort to conclude a deal just, you know, just before time ran out with the Soviets. Nothing had been concluded. Also, you had to, you know . . . Vice President Bush had not really been in those meetings with Gorbachev. He had to satisfy himself that Gorbachev was for real. The Cold War still was on. You have to remember that. They were still supplying weapons through Cuba to Nicaragua. There was still the Angola problem. We had major arms control negotiations going on, and many of them were stuck. Chemical weapons was stuck. Sea launch cruise missiles and the linkage with START was a sticking point. We had a lot, there's still a lot of problems. So it wasn’t a case of the Cold War being over. I mean, I really sort of think, you know, you can’t underestimate the significance of Ronald Reagan’s role in ending the Cold War. But there’s a lot of grounds to debate exactly when that Cold War ended. A lot of people will tell you it ended when the wall came down. Course, Ronald Reagan called for the wall to come down. Ronald Reagan was the architect of our buildup of peace through strength when we first came in in '81. But I think it's a mistake really to try and say it ended on one time or another. I mean I think it was the combined effort . . . the policy of peace through strength, which was a policy of the two Reagan administrations and the Bush administration, that caused a peaceful end to the Cold War. And primarily President Bush managed that end skillfully. That did not have to end peacefully.

So the policy review didn’t really alter the basic policy approach; it was just a matter of stopping to see where they were at and how President Bush could move forward?

That’s correct. It didn’t stop it. Well, you say stop it . . . it put a little pause in it there for a while while we completed the review. If you read the books, including mine, you’ll see that the review was a disappointment. We didn’t feel that it really went into the depth that it needed to go into. But by May of the first year of the Bush term we had concluded that Gorbachev and Sheverdaze were people we could do business with, and that we should move forward and move forward rather aggressively. And we did.

Was the Bush administration hesitant to provide concessions to Gorbachev out of concern that he would not be able to maintain power?
Well, that was certainly a factor throughout, but we always felt that Gorbachev was a reformer. As I told you earlier, we had to determine whether or not we could trust these guys. We had to determine whether or not the positive steps toward change in the relationship that occurred at the end of the Reagan administration were in fact legitimate or real. So I guess you’d have to say yes to your question. I mean, we had to make sure that these were people that wanted to reform. And by May of ’89, we had concluded that, at least I had and you’ll see that in my book and in At The Highest Levels, we concluded . . . and then President Bush had by July because we went ahead and had a summit right then and there. If you remember we had Malta . . . I guess that was July.

Did the foreign policy review hurt the Bush administration on the domestic front? Did he take a lot of criticism for that?

Well, there was a lot of press criticism, but it was the right thing to do, in my opinion, rather than just charging, hard charging, in there. If Gorbachev and Sheverdnadze had not been for real, it would have been a mistake.

Did the events surrounding the 1989 revolution in Eastern Europe and the fall of the Berlin Wall prove to the Bush administration that the changes being made by Gorbachev were not merely cosmetic or easily reversible? That they were more permanent?

No, what it proved to us was that the Soviet leadership had, in fact, as they had told us they had, ruled out the use of force to keep the empire together. That was the critical factor. They told us early on they weren’t going to use force to keep the empire together. And when they didn’t that proved that they were telling us the truth and that they could be trusted and that we could do business with them.

What was Bush’s private reaction to the fall of the Berlin Wall?

Oh, he was very very pleased with it. We were all . . . it was quite an emotional event. But I still think that history will prove that he was absolutely right in not trying to stick it in the eye of the Soviets, not trying to goad them or, as everyone put it at the time, “dance on the wall.” That would have been a terrible mistake politically and diplomatically.

Did he fear that a Western celebration of the wall’s collapse might encourage a backlash by the hard-liners in East Berlin and Moscow?

He feared that. Well, yes he feared that in part, but also he feared that it would make it tougher for us to continue to move forward positively with Gorbachev. You don’t stick it in somebody’s eye when something is fundamental and as big and important as that happens. You celebrate it but you do so in a more statesmanlike way. Because, that would have been counter productive for us to start . . . even today when we talk
about winning the Cold War, and I see Gorbachev today, and even today when we talk about winning the Cold War, he takes offense at that. He says, “You didn’t win the Cold War; we came to an understanding, a peaceful resolution of our differences.”

At Malta, Gorbachev said to Bush, “We don’t consider you an enemy anymore.” And then he went on to say that he actually wanted the U.S. to maintain a presence in Europe. You mention in your book that you considered that to be the most important statement of the Malta conference. Why was that so important?

Well, because it showed that the relationship had moved from confrontation to cooperation. I mean, for 40 years we’d been enemies.

There were no formal agreements reached at Malta. Was it primarily a trust-building meeting?

Yeah, I think so. Yeah, there were not a lot of specifics that were accomplished there, but it was a very good trust-building meeting. And remember that I had been having meetings with Sheverdnadze before Malta at which I had become convinced that the Soviet leadership was real when they were talking about reform and when they were talking about renouncing the use of force. President Bush needed to hear that and see that and experience that himself with the head of the Soviet Union.

In the Malta negotiations, how did the Baltic crisis affect Bush’s support of Gorbachev?

Well, look, that is such an expansive question. Again, I would simply refer you to my book because it comes back all the time. There were two or three incidents in the Baltics from the time, in the aftermath of Malta until the Gulf War. In fact, there was a real period of doubt in our minds on January 12 or 13, 1991, just before the Gulf War when the Soviets sent their interior Oman troops into the Baltics and seized radio stations and stuff like that, and we thought maybe they were trying to capitalize on the fact that we were so committed in the Gulf. And that was way up in January of 1991. . . but I go into all that stuff in exquisite detail, and I just can’t do it here on the phone.

Did the Bush administration agree at anytime to back off of the commitment to SDI in order to achieve Soviet concessions in other arms reduction talks?

No.

They stayed committed to SDI?

Yeah.
President Bush assigned you the task of working toward the reduction of chemical weapons stockpiles. Considering that had not really been on the Reagan agenda, is that an achievement of the Bush administration?

Well, it was a treaty that was negotiated that was concluded during the Bush administration and, you know, people today will still argue whether it’s verifiable, whether it’s a good treaty or not a good treaty. I think it’s a good treaty, and it was certainly an accomplishment of the Bush administration. And President Bush and I both worked in '94 or '95, whenever it was, I guess '96 or '97, to get it ratified. We helped the Clinton administration get ratification of it.

In February of 1990, you met with Gorbachev to explain the Two-plus-Four process. What was his overall reaction to that process?

I don’t think he had a real problem with the process. I think they were interested in a treaty of peace. I think they were interested in seeing Germany unified outside of NATO, at least with respect to the eastern part of Germany.

How was the Bush administration finally able to convince Gorbachev a unified Germany should remain in NATO?

Well, I think we took advantage of a very narrow window of opportunity. Unification of Germany as a member of NATO was one of the distinct and lasting accomplishments, I think, of the Bush administration, much more important probably than the chemical weapons convention. I think, if you look at the unification of Germany, the management of the collapse of communism and the implosion of the Soviet Union, the Gulf War, and the Middle East peace process, those are the major foreign policy accomplishments of the four years of the Bush administration.

Moving to your close working relationship with Shevardnadze, was Shevardnadze more inclined than Gorbachev to take risks to end the Cold War and stand up to the hard-liners in the Soviet Union in order to push for things like German unification, arms control, and other issues?

The answer’s yes, although he wasn’t pushing for German unification in NATO. That was a very tough topic. But the answer to your question is yes.

Was personal diplomacy really the key to shaping the post-Cold War world?

Well, I don’t know. That’s an overstatement. Personal diplomacy was very important. I think President Bush believes in it. I certainly believe in it, and personal diplomacy to me does not mean that you put personal relationships ahead of principle or ahead of your party’s or country’s interests. It just means that if you can trust a person on the other side of the table, you have a lot better chance of getting things done. I have a whole chapter on that in the book by the way.
Did Bush’s relationship with Gorbachev cause him to be slow in reacting to the rise of Yeltsin?

The answer to that is an emphatic no. The press loved that argument and they used to write it. They also wrote that Clinton was stuck with Yeltsin too long. But when you’ve got a reformer in power and things are going the way you want ‘em to go, then you stick with that person, particularly when they’re freely elected, as Yeltsin was. So that’s just a fun and games exercise by the press that don’t know what they’re talking about. I would ask you this in your research. What did we lose by hanging in there with Gorbachev and Sheverdnadze? When Yeltsin came to power, he embraced us even more whole-heartedly. We didn’t lose a damn thing. And we gained a lot. So we’ll shoot that one down. That is the dumbest thing and it keeps cropping up.

So it was more a fabrication of the press that was really just trying to attack Bush on the domestic front?

Well, I don’t know if the press were attacking him. I’m not going to say that. But all I’m saying is that argument is just totally without foundation or without rational or reason. If you look at what happened, yes, we stuck with Gorbachev. He was the General Secretary and then President of the Soviet Union. And when Yeltsin came onboard . . . when I went over there in December of ’91 before the implosion of the Soviet Union, I met with Yeltsin. He met with me in St. Catherine’s Hall. Why’d he do that? To stick it in Gorbachev’s eye. But certainly his embrace of the United States was total and complete, 100 percent, every bit as much as Gorbachev. We didn’t lose anything by doing that.

Would you point to the reunification of Germany as the main achievement of the Bush administration?

Well, I’d point to that. But I would also point to the fact that the Cold War ended peacefully. And it didn’t have to end peacefully. And it was President Bush’s adroit management—diplomacy and political management—of the process that permitted it to end peacefully. Now, those are the accomplishments with respect to the Soviet Union and the Cold War. And there were other accomplishments, which I mentioned like the Gulf War, the Middle East peace process, the Madrid conference, and those things. But, you know, when the Soviets stood up in August of 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and Iraq was a big Soviet client state. And I flew back, I happened to be in Mongolia at the time, I flew back through Moscow. And Shevardnadze, without even clearing it with Gorbachev, joined with me in a statement condemning the invasion and calling for an arms embargo of Iraq. Now that was historic. The first time ever that the Soviet Union foreign minister and the Secretary of State of the United States would ever have a joint press conference condemning the action of a Soviet client state. And so in my book what I say is that’s the day, at least to me, it was quite clear, if it wasn’t clear the day the wall fell, it was certainly clear that day that the
Cold War was over. But that's the kind of cooperation we were able to achieve from them. I mean nobody could conceive of that happening.

The cooperation fostered by the Bush administration, that is really the true achievement as far as the end of the Cold War because it completely changed the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union?

That's correct.

How did you first meet George Bush?

Well, I first met him in 1972 when he was Representative to the United Nations and I was military assistant to President Nixon. And I’ve been sort of close to him ever since.

And when did he ask you to be his National Security Advisor?

He asked me on the week before Thanksgiving in 1988.

The Tower Commission, which you served on, found that Reagan’s National Security Council experienced a lack of accountability and direction. What steps did you take when you became the National Security Advisor to improve on this?

Well, before I became National Security Advisor I talked both to Frank Carlucci, who was Reagan’s National Security Advisor or became his National Security Advisor, and I talked to Carlucci at length about the problems I saw in the Reagan administration that had let the Iran-Contra thing grow, and made some suggestions. And Carlucci did some of them and passed the rest on to Colin Powell, who was Carlucci’s successor. So by the time I got there there wasn’t much left. One of the things I did do is make sure in my morning meetings with the president that there was always somebody else there to make a note of what I was asked to do and what I told the president, so that we would have some kind of record by a third person of that kind of operational meeting, which had not always been the case in the Reagan administration.

You’ve said that President Bush in private made clear that he wanted to take charge of the foreign policy agenda and try to shape events rather than be shaped by them.

Yes.

That completely goes against the public perception of him as being very cautious. Why was there such a difference between the public perception of him and the way he went about foreign policy in private?
You know that’s a good question . . . that’s a good question. I’m not sure that I know the answer to that. He was much more decisive in moving out in private than he appeared in his public persona. I think he was deeply affected by his mother who used to tell him all the time, “George, don’t brag.” And so I think he tended in public to underplay things. That’s the only explanation I can give. He was not a great strategist, but he had wonderful instincts and he wanted to move out and get things done. And so when you’d give him an idea, if it was a good one, he was ready to charge off on it, and did frequently. I can’t give you any better explanation for that.

You are quoted in a book saying that President Reagan’s rush toward disarmament had been a “mighty dubious objective for grown-ups in this business.” Was the policy review in 1989 an effort to slow down the rush toward disarmament and make sure that it was accomplished in a very careful and prudent manner?

No, it wasn’t really designed to slow down. It was designed for two things. First of all, to review where we were going. The Reagan administration had put the emphasis on numbers, reducing numbers and getting rid of certain kinds of weapons. I didn’t think that was the overall goal in arms control. I thought the goal in arms control was to improve stability, to reduce the chances that in a crisis either side would resort to the use of nuclear weapons for fear of some vulnerability in the nuclear arsenal. So that’s what I wanted to do, and numbers had nothing to do with that. So I wanted to rethink where we were going and see if we wanted to modify the arms control proposals that Reagan had left before the Soviet Union. But there was another and even more important thing that I wanted to accomplish. For the 20 years before the Reagan administration, the chief issue between us and the Soviet Union was arms control. I say issue . . . the thing we talked about . . . that was the only thing that we had to talk about. And I wanted to change that a little and to focus on Eastern Europe. There was ferment in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland. And I wanted to take advantage of that ferment to try and get the Soviet army out of Eastern Europe, or at least reduce their presence to allow the Eastern Europeans to develop in a progressive way. So I wanted to put arms control on the back burner for a time until we had gotten our Eastern Europe strategy underway and moving.

During this policy review, was there disagreement between the Defense Department, the State Department, and the White House concerning how the arms control progress should be made?

No, not a great deal. The chief problem with the policy reviews is that they didn’t produce anything. They were sort of bureaucratic exercises, and it’s not surprising that the bureaucracy thought everything was going well because they had designed the policy. So mostly we got back studies that said do more of the same. That was the principle problem, and as a result, we just fashioned policies ourselves within the NSC and then debated them in the NSC.
Because of his extensive experience with foreign policy, did President Bush intend to make the final decision by himself, or was it more of a collective decision?

Well, it was never a collective decision. He always made the decision, but he liked to debate it with his advisors. He liked to ask questions; he liked to provoke people to defend their views and so on and so forth. That helped him clarify the issues in his own mind. So, rarely did he make major decisions without a lot of back and forth with his advisors in order to settle things in his own mind. I can't answer the question how much was he influenced by other people, because he always had an open mind. But in the end, he's the only decision-maker in the executive branch.

SDI was a much-criticized program domestically. But it was used by both the Reagan and Bush administrations to bring Gorbachev to the bargaining table. Marlin Fitzwater told me in an interview a couple of weeks ago that every meeting between Gorbachev and Reagan ended with a plea toward getting us to drop SDI. How would you characterize the importance of SDI as a leverage tool in negotiations with the Soviets?

Honestly, this will probably disappoint you, I don't think very much. I think they were afraid of SDI because... not so much because they thought it would work, but that if we went down that path, they would have to follow and it was too expensive for them. They didn't have the resources. That did it. But my sense is that it tended rather than to use as leverage to get other things we wanted, it tended to stymie the negotiations because we would never put SDI on the table. So the Russians tended to drag their feet because of that.

You said in your book that U.S. policy toward Eastern Europe was not a catalyst for change. That it merely provided solid encouragement and allowed the U.S. to react properly to events. Would you please elaborate on this?

We did not stimulate ferment in Eastern Europe. We had done that earlier in the '70s and indeed in the '50s when we helped stimulate the Hungarian revolt and so on. That turned out to be counter productive because when we turned people out in the streets, we weren't prepared to support them. So what we tried to do was to encourage reform at a level that we thought would be below that the Soviet Union would think they would have to crush it. So we wanted to keep it going but we didn't want it smashed, as was usually the case with revolt in Eastern Europe with all of the leaders killed or put in prison. And that's what we tried to do and it turned out, you know, because of our skill or because of luck it turned out that that was very effective in this case.

What were President Bush's goals for the Malta conference? Was it meant to be more of a trust-building meeting?

It was primarily more of a trust-building meeting. He had wanted from the outset of his administration to talk with Gorbachev and I think Dick Cheney had held him back
because historically the Soviet Union always profited by summits because there was an atmosphere that, you know the Cold War was over; we didn’t have to worry. And that always made it harder for us to get appropriations through Congress and so on. So we didn’t want—I didn’t want, and Cheney didn’t want—a summit until we had something specific to get from it, that is an arms control agreement or something else. And early in the administration we didn’t have anything yet. So the president acquiesced in holding off a summit. Then in the summer of ’89, as a result of his trip through Eastern Europe and what he saw there and his meeting with his European allies at the G-7 summit, he decided that he had to talk with Gorbachev, that things were moving too fast, that there was too much danger of misunderstanding, and so he had to talk with Gorbachev. But he, in fact, he didn’t even want to call it a summit. He wanted to call it an exchange of views, not to make agreements, which summits usually are, but just to exchange views. And he was delighted with the idea of a summit out away from everybody where the press couldn’t be hovering around and where there would be little pressure for either side to try to make negotiating points or debating points.

Is that why the negotiations leading up to the Malta conference were kept secret? He didn’t want to build it up too much?

That was part of it. The other is that we couldn’t find a place to hold it.

How did the collapse of the Berlin Wall affect the Malta negotiations?

They were set by the time the Berlin Wall came down, and I think that what it did is mostly underscore the importance of the two leaders talking because unexpected events could turn into a crisis very easily. Gorbachev was very frightened by the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Can the Malta meeting in 1989 be seen as the point when our relationship with the Soviets truly changed?

I think the relationship between the two leaders changed. That was the most dramatic. . . that they got comfortable with each other, and from that time on . . . there was a rough patch in the spring of 1990 over the Baltic states . . . but the two knew each other as individuals. They would occasionally call each other on the phone and so forth. So the personal relationship changed, and that was very beneficial.

In your book, you identify the Bush-Kohl meeting after Malta as a turning point. Why was that meeting so pivotal?

It was pivotal because Kohl was sort of out on his own, both inside Germany . . . Genscher, they had a free democratic party, was worried about moving too fast and wanted a different kind of relationship between East and West Germany. The other allies didn’t want German unification, so Kohl was kind of feeling his way. And they
had this meeting and the president said, you know, “I’m not worried. I like your ideas. You go ahead; I’ll back you. I’ll keep everybody else off your back.” So he gave, in essence, a blank check to Kohl to move ahead. And from then on it was a pretty steady course.

What were the problems surrounding reunification that had to be resolved before the process could move forward?

Well, there were two problems. First of all, there was the problem of unification itself. And that is that East Germany was the crown jewel of the Soviet bloc. That was the major achievement, if you will, out of World War II. And so it was difficult to say, “Yes, we failed there.” And secondly, it was the heart of the Warsaw Pact. It’s pretty hard to have a viable Warsaw Pact if East Germany is not in it. So that was the problem with unification. Then there was an added problem is suppose you let Germany unify—What do you do about membership in NATO? Because East Germany was in the Warsaw Pact. West Germany was in NATO. And that was a very hard pill for Gorbachev to swallow. And in the end I think that he swallowed it only because he didn’t have a better alternative. He toyed around with the idea of a neutral Germany, but I think he decided that that would be more dangerous—to have a neutral Germany loose in Europe, than one tied down by the United States. So those are the major issues.

What problems were created for the U.S. when, because of the August coup, much of Gorbachev’s power shifted to Yeltsin?

Well, the problems that were created is that from then until the end of the Soviet Union most everything turned into a struggle between Gorbachev and Yeltsin. And Yeltsin was determined to destroy Gorbachev. And so we had little affect on internal developments during that period because he was determined to do that. And he succeeded.

Did President Bush prefer to have at least some form of the Soviet Union survive rather than face the possibility of chaos because a strong central government could at least maintain reliable control over the nuclear arsenal?

No, we had a long debate about what our preferences were, and Baker was on one side of the arguments that you just made; Cheney was on the other side saying we actively ought to try to split up the Soviet Union. And we debated and came to no firm conclusion, so we really didn’t have a position. We just let nature take its course.

Why did President Bush recognize Ukrainian independence four days before the Ukrainians themselves voted on the issue? Didn’t that really upset Gorbachev?

It was domestic politics.
He just felt the pressure to move?

Yes.

Did President Bush phone Yeltsin and Gorbachev to persuade them to peacefully work together during the transition?

Well, I don’t recall him making a special call with that in mind. But he certainly did his best to ensure a peaceful transfer. And he talked to both of them frequently during that period.

Marlin Fitzwater told me that the Malta conference was the point at which the U.S. first recognized that Communism was changing and might collapse. In the conversation I had with James Baker, he points to a joint press conference that he had with Sheverdnadze just prior to the Persian Gulf War as being the moment when the Cold War was clearly over. What moment would you identify as being the pivotal point in the changing relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union?

Well, I would say, the point at which I was willing to say the Cold War is over is when Gorbachev in July of 1990 . . . Kohl went over to visit him . . . and Gorbachev said it was alright if a unified Germany could belong to NATO. To me that was the end of the Cold War.

So once he recognized the reunification of Germany, that was the end?

Yeah. Now later on, certainly, the fact that, as Baker says, the fact that we were on the same side against aggression in the Persian Gulf, that certainly cemented it. But I thought that . . . the Cold War was really about Eastern Europe. And with the unification of Germany and its membership in NATO, that really finished the Cold War.

In a talk that I had yesterday with James Baker, he said that the main accomplishment of the Bush administration was “seeing to it that the Cold War ended with a whimper and not a bang.” Is that the real legacy of the Bush administration that President Bush was able to bring incremental change rather than allowing the Cold War to end in some big, and perhaps dangerous, moment?

Well, I think, yeah, that’s basically it. Dying empires rarely go out peacefully. And I think that President Bush recognized historic change was taking place. He didn’t create the change. But what he did is manage it in a way that these really cataclysmic changes in the world structure took place without a shot being fired.
Everyone takes it for granted now, but the Cold War did not have to end peacefully. There was still a great deal of uncertainty when President Bush took office.

Absolutely. The Cold War . . . well, you know the Reagan administration tends to think they ended the Cold War. I think the Cold War was not at all ended when Bush came into office. Eastern Europe was still divided just like it was before. The Soviet army was still manning barricades and so on. No, it happened under President Bush, and it happened the way it did in considerable part because of his great skill at diplomacy about eliciting cooperation from people, both friends and opponents.

Marlin Fitzwater told me that he felt the country was very fortunate to have Reagan president when he was because he was the ultimate cold warrior and we needed that warrior, we needed that symbolic leader at that time for the peace through strength program. But when President Bush took office what we really needed was a skillful diplomat who excelled at personal diplomacy and help wrap things up peacefully. Would you agree with that?

Yes, I think that's true. I think Reagan . . . The Carter administration was . . . well, they had a tough time. But in a way it was sort of a disaster because everything was going wrong for us and it was the end of Vietnam and Watergate, and the Soviet Union was talking about the correlation of forces and the world was changing in their favor and so on. So what we needed was Reagan to restore American spirits and to have us stand up and stand up tall. But it took Bush to bring it to an end. Yeah.
Appendix D
Colin Powell Interview


My first question concerns the 1988 meeting in New York between Gorbachev, President Reagan, and President-elect Bush. What was the purpose of that meeting and were there signs at the meeting that the Bush administration would be more cautious with Gorbachev than Reagan?

The meeting was really as a result of a request from President Gorbachev. I was national security advisor and we were not expecting to have any more summits or meetings. Really, it was not a summit. In fact, we carefully did not call it a summit. But we were not planning to have any more meetings with Gorbachev, and suddenly he said, “Well, I’m going to be in the United Nations” . . . September wasn’t it? September of ’88? . . . “I’m going to be at the United Nations for the general session and would like to meet and have one final go at it, to talk.” And so it was hard to say no at that point. Wait, I’m sorry. It wasn’t September. It was after the election, so it was December. It wasn’t the general assembly meeting; then it must have been some other UN appearance. But, be that as it may, he initiated it and, of course, we accepted it. No reason not to accept it. We made it clear to the Soviets, however, that we were not looking for a substantive exchange. It was a good way to say goodbye Reagan-Gorbachev and also say hello to President Bush. There was nervousness on the part of President Bush and his associates that perhaps the Soviets might try to throw some proposal at us that they would have to deal with before they had even come into office. And so, yes, there was nervousness on the Bush side.

Brent Scowcroft and James Baker told me that the National Security Council during the Bush administration operated more smoothly than it had during the Reagan administration, especially prior to the changes made after Iran-Contra. Do you think that was the case and what would you attribute that to?

Yeah, now after Iran-Contra it was still the Reagan-Bush administration. My own view is that, and this is a very self-serving view as you can imagine, that when Mr. Carlucci took over and I was his deputy, we restored a sense of process and discipline to the National Security Council and its functioning. Then there were some additional changes in personality when Mr. Carlucci went to the Pentagon and Mr. Weinberger left. And a more cooperative relationship emerged between the State Defense and the NSC. And I would say that it continued into and through the Bush administration. But
I'm not going to bite and say that the Bush administration was better than the last two years of the Reagan administration. That would not be right, sir.

Was it easier to work for President Bush because of his knowledge and experience in foreign affairs and did he take charge of his meetings with his advisors more than Reagan who you describe in your book as having a passive management style?

They were different people, and so I don't want to compare them in that way because it is not the right comparison. President Reagan relied more on his advisors to shape issues for him, and President Bush got a little more deeply involved in the shaping of the issues but didn't constrain his staff. And he wanted to hear more of the in and out, up and down debates and dialogues over the various issues than President Reagan. But it doesn't mean that President Bush was better at it. It's just two different styles. And President Clinton was yet a different style altogether.

In your book, you write that you saw your main mission as chairman of the JCS to be able to move the armed forces onto a new course. You called this strategic overview, "When You Lose Your Best Enemy." Would you please explain your basic goals in the overview and describe how it evolved into the concept of a "base force"?

Yeah, for 40 years or there abouts we had built our armed forces against a single contingency, and that was war with the Soviet Union. We fought other wars meanwhile in Korea and Vietnam, but it was always part of a possible conflict with the Soviet Union. These were sort of surrogates for the great war that might be coming. Our research and development was always trying to build a new tank better than the latest Soviet tank, build a new airplane better than the latest Soviet airplane. Build a 600-ship navy, why? So we could cross the Atlantic under threat of all of those Soviet submarines. Everything we did related to what we thought the Soviets might be doing and how we might have to fight them. And this dominated defense thinking, defense research and concurrence, our base structure, our National Guard and reserves, were all structured for this long war. We had depot facilities all over the country to rebuild equipment during this long war. We built up our nuclear weapons, tactical nuclear weapons especially . . . thousands of them, to fight this war. And then suddenly, they quit. The Soviet Union went away, and this war was not going to be fought; it was never going to be fought. And there we were with a structure and a philosophy and a theology that was based on that conflict with that enemy. And so I thought it was our responsibility, the military leaders of the department working with our political leaders, to reshape the armed forces and begin to modify them to recognize this change. And we'd better do it quickly because there'd be a thousand people out there with better ideas, they thought, than we had as to how to do it and because the Congress and the American people were rightfully, rightfully demanding a peace dividend, meaning that if you have lost this enemy, then you shouldn't have to spend as much on defense. And if you still want to spend on defense, then what for. So
the what for became the two major regional contingency answer, which I think made sense then and still makes sense. We might have to fight a regional war, not World War III, but a regional war in either the Persian Gulf area or in Northeast Asia. Saddam Hussein helped make that thesis come true a few months later and that still remains national strategy even though people attack it constantly; it still remains the strategy. And then we downsized the force. And people have criticized the way we did that and I have been criticized that it wasn’t a bold enough set of changes. But people remember that when we started to downsize the force, there still was a lingering potential threat from the declining Soviet Union and even from the new Russia. So we were doing it during a time of historic change. Would they reverse? Would it go back the other way? And we did it prudently, got down to that lower size. Unfortunately, the current administration has made it even lower. And I think there is some distress within the force, but it’s still the best in the world.

Did the Goldwater-Nichols authority help you speed up the process and allow you to push for force reductions even over the objections of some of the chiefs?

To the extent that Goldwater-Nichols did not require me to speak with the corporate voice. In other words, I can speak in my own right as principle military advisor. All the other chiefs are military advisors to the president as well. But, because the chairman is the principle military advisor, I did not need the chiefs to vote on what my advice should be for the corporate body. That was of enormous help. But the great influence that I was able to use was the influence given to me by my superiors. The fact that Mr. Cheney found the ideas that we came up with useful and that the president found them useful and relevant to the challenges they had is really what made it work more so than bureaucratic imprimatur of Goldwater-Nichols.

During the Persian Gulf War, Secretary Baker suggested Soviet military participation in coalition efforts as a way of demonstrating that the Cold War was over. Most of the administration objected to this and thought it was premature to invite them in. Would you go over some of the discussions that took place, including your opinion on the subject?

I don’t even know what he’s . . . what you’re talking about. I read the questions and so I don’t know who these other people are that you say “most of the administration objected to this.” What’s the basis for that?

Brent Scowcroft, in his book for example, and in a conversation I had with him said that he thought it was too soon.

That’s one.

Bush mentions it in his book.
But they all invited the Soviets to do something with us in the Persian Gulf War and they didn’t do much, but they were certainly on our side voting. So even though there may have been reservations, we didn’t stiff them. And I don’t know that we asked for a lot from the Soviets. So I don’t know that I have anything to add to this, and I certainly don’t remember any particular conversations.

Secretary Baker told me in an interview that when he announced at a joint press conference with Sheveradnadze that both countries were denouncing the Iraqi invasion, that was the point when he was willing to say the Cold War was over. When were you willing to say the Cold War was over?

I don’t know that I was a precise one; I had been saying since 1988 that it’s starting to end. I gave a speech in the spring of 1988 [1989], after I became the Forscom commander and after I gave up the NSC post, where I tried to share with my fellow senior Army generals the fact that I thought that this was all going to be radically different in a few years. And I even... to have a little interest in my speech and to give them something to put their teeth into, I said in that speech, and you can find it in my book somewhere, “If tomorrow morning we opened NATO for membership, I wouldn’t be surprised to see every member of the Warsaw Pact apply.” Well, they didn’t know whether to put me in a loony bin or rubber room or just ignore me. But as early as then, I could see that these changes were historic. But the end of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, I guess for me as a finite date in time was Christmas 1991 when the Soviet Union ended.

You made a trip to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1991 and wrote a report for the president stating that there was deep disaffection in the upper reaches of the Soviet military. Would you briefly explain your findings?

He was going to be following me through the Soviet Union a few weeks later, and he wanted my observations... I think it was only a couple of days behind me. You probably know. I don’t recall off the top of my head... And so after traveling across the Soviet Union and talking to a lot of their generals, many of whom just didn’t understand the reality of the situation they were in... I still remember lecturing a bunch of Soviet generals at the general staff academy, and afterwards when I was through, my colleague, my counterpart General Moiseyev and all the others just leaping up and not really facing the realities. I said, “You guys, you’re going to have to cut back sharply; you’re probably going to have to go to a volunteer force,” and they just kept dismissing it. And so there was a lack of reality to the situation they were in. I also could sense deep, deep uncertainty and discomfort among the senior ranks of the Soviet military leaders. They were also very troubled over what they saw in Desert Storm and in what they saw in terms of the sophistication of the West and what we could do, and we were no longer that weak sistered, soft, not terribly competent military that they might have been counting on. And finally, I just saw generation after generation of Soviet weaponry abandoned in airfields. Every time they brought in a new generation of equipment, they just left the other generations
laying around. And I could see that the Red Army was essentially bankrupting the
country, and it could not continue; it was not sustainable.

**Did you prefer some sort of confederation or central authority to control nuclear
weapons when the breakup of the Soviet Union was coming?**

Well, yeah, and I was glad that there was a central authority. I mean the Soviet rocket
forces never, they never wavered in their diligence of protecting and accounting for
their nuclear weapons. And I was very pleased when ultimately in the next
administration, American administration, all those weapons from Kazakhstan and
Belarus and Ukraine were moved back into Russia. Even though there had been
occasional reports and a lot of scary stories from time to time, nobody can demonstrate
that they have lost anyone of those nuclear weapons.

**How would you describe the foreign policy legacy of President Bush in terms of
the end of the Cold War?**

He is the one who guided the Cold War to its end, and he did it with great skill. The
unification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet Union without us gloating about it
was very wisely done by the president, certain magnanimity in the manner in which he
dealt with Gorbachev and then Yeltsin, and I think that he played a key role at the end.
A lot of things came together to cause the end to come. And your last question asking
who should be given credit for the end of the Cold War . . . well, there are so many
events, people, and situations that led to the end, but I would just cite two, just to be a
little provocative: One, they were living a lie. You can’t live a lie forever. So the lie
eventually caught up with them. But, two, you want to know what really broke the
Soviet Union? It was the Red Army. They bankrupted the country. They couldn’t
afford it. The Red Army continued to insist that they had to be afforded, and
Gorbachev is the one who realized this can not keep going. And he tried to reform it,
but he couldn’t reform it fast enough and he turned loose forces that were
uncontainable. Remember, the reason he wanted . . . the reason he allowed Germany
unified, the reason he wanted good relations with the West, the reason he was willing
to watch the Warsaw Pact breakup is because he had to breakup the rationale for the
Red Army. Once you broke the rationale for the Red Army, you could use those
resources to do for your country what your country needed done—rebuild a society,
figure out how to make washing machines, not tanks. And so the only way he could
bring the Red Army under control and divert those resources was to get rid of the war.
Appendix E
Jack F. Matlock, Jr., Interview


The first thing I want to ask you about is something you referenced in your speech, and that is you said the date the Cold War ended in you mind was Gorbachev’s UN speech and then the Governor’s Island meeting. You said that was primarily because the ideology of the Cold War ended.

That’s correct, and I distinguish between the ideological end to the Cold War and, as I say, all of the cleanup diplomacy, which was important. It’s sort of like something happening at the end of a crisis, but you don’t know if there’s going to be a relapse if you’re speaking in medical terms. So it had to be confirmed, but it was confirmed over the next two years. But I would say... another reason is that the diplomacy changed totally because from January, from the Bush administration on, we really espoused the same goals—we wanted peace, and we wanted to free up the countries in Eastern Europe, and Gorbachev thought they would stay socialist even if they went free. When they didn’t, he was willing to accept it, so he was as good as his word, so to speak, later when the push came to shove. And German reunification... in the final analysis, he didn’t stand in the way, and he even blessed it, which was something that would have been hard to predict. So I think that, in general, we no longer had totally antagonistic goals. After all, the Cold War was conceived as a zero-sum game—any gain for one was [a loss for] the other—and then suddenly we started looking at how can we disengage, how can we serve the interests of everybody. In that sense, that’s why I say I think it ended ideologically. That’s not to deny that there was a lot of important diplomacy to be done to clear up the remnants of the Cold War, the results. I also think the Cold War started when the Bolshevik Revolution succeeded in Russia. I don’t think it started in 1945 or 1946, only when geopolitical and in the form of a military confrontation. But it was there inherently from the time the Bolsheviks took over what was then Russia and turned it into the Soviet Union because their whole philosophy was based on the class struggle—the victory of the proletariat. Even though they didn’t talk about it that much after WWII, this was inherent in their philosophy if you look at what they understood. So in effect, there was a Cold War. Even when we were Allies during WWII, Stalin treated us as almost enemies in the sense that he didn’t allow any real contact with his people. If they had contact with westerners in Moscow, he sent them off to prison camps and so on because he wanted to close off the country because he thought they were in a life or death struggle with the rest of the world, and of course, eventually they would prevail. That’s why they never had any hesitation in using military force when they thought they could.
could be circumspect about it, but in Africa and other areas if it was a matter of supporting somebody who claimed to represent sort of the proletariat against the imperialists, they were quite willing to support them if they thought they had any chance at all. And, of course, they started this in the 1920s, except at that time the British were considered the main enemy. So, yeah, I think the Cold War started when a political party based on a Marxist ideology took power in Russia and turned it into a Socialist state, which was to be a vanguard of the world proletariat and the future world state. Until that philosophy on which that rested, which was the Marxist class struggle, was dropped, the Cold War would have been there. It could have been more intense or less intense, but the feeling that they were in a zero-sum conflict with the rest of the world would have persisted.

So you saw it a based on ideology. President Reagan saw the Cold War based on ideology. But when I did an interview with Brent Scowcroft, he said that he and President Bush did not see the Cold War as being about ideology. He pointed to the division of Europe that George Kennan described, and he said for them that was the basis as they saw the Cold War. So he said when they were trying to resolve issues, that's what they were looking at rather than the ideology. So does that explain really the differences in philosophy between the Reagan administration and the Bush administration? That maybe they saw the Cold War itself as having a different definition?

There were some differences, but I'm not sure that Brent would disagree with the way I would put it. I don't deny that, sure, I think they could say that we're not sure the Cold War is over until these things happen—that is that Europe is united and what not—but I would say that the Cold War was not fundamentally about the division of Europe. The division of Europe occurred because of the Cold War, and that, sure, people are not going to perceive that it is over until that division stops—and they were right to concentrate on that, that's right. But what I'm saying is, and what took them a while to recognize—in fact, they really didn't recognize it until December when they got to Malta, in the meeting in Malta—was, that Gorbachev had already accepted. In other words, they didn't really test him early on because Scowcroft still thought the Cold War was not over. Well, you know, I would say in Gorbachev's mind it was over, and that was the important thing. Now, you know, that didn't mean that automatically we were going to be able to solve these problems, only if it turned out that under different circumstances, in the push, he would live with what he said. But it turned out he would. So, I'm not saying we had full confirmation that it was over. Clearly, we couldn't say . . . we couldn't say it was over until we saw all the results that it was over. But having seen that, you can look back and say, okay, the back was broken at this point. And after that, the diplomacy was no longer zero sum; it was how to solve problems. And I think somewhat to Bush's surprise and Scowcroft's, Gorbachev agreed with alacrity—in fact, he offered at Malta that he wasn't going to use force in Eastern Europe. And it rather surprised them that he would make that commitment. He would have made that commitment in February or March, but they didn't ask him. They kept putting off the summit for various reasons. So they didn't
really push things along very fast or it could’ve happened even sooner, some of these things. But, in any event, I think what we’re saying is not necessarily contradictory. I don’t say that all the results of the Cold War ended in December ’88. What I say is I think that was when Gorbachev officially discarded—and this was a process, the discarding—that ideology had happened step by step. It didn’t just happen suddenly, but that’s when he officially confirmed that the ideology was going to be different and that their policy was going to be based on what he called the common interests of mankind. Now you could still argue about what the common interests were. It was still politically difficult for him to give up Eastern Europe. He was not going to take the initiative there. But what he could do, once East Europeans understood that the Soviet Union was not going to intervene militarily, they could take matters into their own hands, which is what they did. So I don’t think we’re saying different things. It’s just that we use different words to express it. But I do think that they were a little slow on, you might say, testing Gorbachev’s words, and they were right to say we can’t put a lot of stock in it until these other things happen.

How would you explain the foreign policy review at the beginning of the Bush administration, the Pause? Would it be part of that lack of recognition or other factors?

Partly that. I think it was largely to reassure the right wing of the Republican party, which never really trusted Bush.

In your book you mention that during the Reagan administration there were differences between what you call the Bush people and the Reagan people. Were those differences in personnel or just in philosophy?

Mainly in personnel. I mean you had Jim Baker as Chief of Staff... but, I mean, I was a professional, so I wasn’t really identified with either, although probably the Bush people thought of me more Reagan than Bush simply because I was brought on by Reagan first. But I didn’t even realize that that acutely until Bush was elected and purged almost everybody from the top ranks of the government. At one point, I know Baker had told me in a private meeting, when he asked me to stay on in Moscow, that, well, you know, they had run three political campaigns and he’s got a lot of people that he has to take care of. Now clearly he didn’t consider the people who had worked for Reagan their people. So I think they did look at their own backers as distinct from the Reagan backers. And their political task was not having the Reagan backers defect. Since many of the right-wing Republicans had thought Reagan had gone soft his last year or so, you know Bush had to sort of stand up and, I think, show that he was tougher.

Why was the Malta conference important?

Because of the understanding regarding Eastern Europe.
Did it have anything to do with image?

Yeah, I think it was image also. I think that finally Gorbachev convinced Bush that he wasn’t going to intervene in Eastern Europe, and Bush convinced Gorbachev that he wasn’t going to make political hay out of it—dance on the wall—and that was very important.

It was important to have a face-to-face meeting where they could really understand each other.

Right. And they had this discussion—I told about it in my book—not to talk about Western values, but to talk about democratic values. That was very important because, one thing, I think the Bush people generally—somehow they never asked me, I guess I would have explained it to them—they didn’t quite grasp Gorbachev’s point that Western values made things seem as if he was the loser. Whereas, since the Soviet Union had claimed to be democratic, even though it wasn’t, you could use the term democratic values, and it was actually Jim Baker that came up with that suggestion.

It was important to Gorbachev to present the image of a mutual understanding rather than of a winner and a loser.

That’s right... absolutely. And I think that wasn’t fully grasped by the Bush people because I think, you know, they understood that... they would have understood that theoretically, yeah, you don’t want to make him seem the loser. But somehow they didn’t grasp as instinctively as Reagan would have—he had a much more instinctive feel of these things, you know the professional relations and how another politician feels. And I think it took Gorbachev to tell them, and then when they thought it through, they understood and went on. Yes, absolutely because that did set the course for the liberation of Eastern Europe.

In your book you mention that the four-part agenda of the Reagan Administration did not include an economic side. When Bush came to power, you felt that it was time to implement an economic side, but he didn’t. Could you talk a little bit about the failure you saw in the Bush administration for not doing that?

I think at first, in ’89, there was a fear, particularly on Baker’s part, that the Soviets would simply get into the international financial and other organizations as troublemakers, as spoilers, and he didn’t want to let them in. And it was true that many of these organizations were setup for market economies, and they did not have a market economy. But I think that’s also a reflection of the fact that Baker hadn’t quite grasped that the Cold War really was over and they were looking for advice and help on how to become a capitalist society, though they didn’t want to use that word. And I think they were very slow in grasping that. But I thought in that first group of cables, which have been declassified and actually are available to researchers, that I wrote that
I knew he would want something new, and I thought that given his background in business and whatnot, to make economic cooperation to bring the Soviet Union into the world economy and to create a market economy there could be, you might say, the watchword of the Bush administration. So I was trying to give him something new. But I think they didn't really grasp the potential until too late. They began to talk about it by the fall of '90—particularly after the invasion of Kuwait and so on when Gorbachev went along, and then that's when Bush sent down the businessmen and so on—but this was without any strategy and without any real briefing about what we wanted to encourage. They hadn't really given any thought to that, and whereas Gorbachev never came up with something worthy of support, at the same time we never gave him any coherent advice either. And the time to give him that advice was '89, and '90 at the very latest. By 1991 it was too late—things had fallen apart too much. But there could have been a lot more direct support for the reformers there if we'd have gotten involved earlier. So I think this was a case that probably—again who could know for sure—if Reagan in his prime had still been president, he probably would have been willing to take that risk, particularly if he could handle the Right-wing, whereas Bush, I think, either because he didn't fully understand how far Gorbachev was probably willing to go or else he just didn't have the imagination to see the potential. He said it himself he really didn't have that vision thing, whereas he had a lot more facts at his command than Reagan did, but Reagan had a vision—that was the difference in the two of them.

You mentioned that many of Gorbachev's concessions—going along with the Gulf War, allowing Germany to be reunified in NATO—were directly or indirectly linked to economic aid. Near the end, was obtaining economic aid the thing most important to Gorbachev?

It was. And what he was offering, as I said, wasn't worthy of it, but we hadn't given him any real help in formulating it. I tried to give my idea of what was going through his mind in that imaginary dialogue.

Considering the huge budget deficits, could the Bush administration have provided Gorbachev with the level of economic aid that he needed. Could they have found the money if they wanted to?

I think they could have found the money if they wanted to. Obviously this made it more difficult that there were budget deficits. But I think they could have, and this is what Thatcher, in effect, when she was no longer Prime Minister in her conversation with me and I'm sure others, she was pressing them to do: You know, George, we need to do it and you don't have to do it all. But, you know, press the Germans. And, by the way, Major was willing to give that very substantial support in January and February '92 after the Soviet Union collapsed. It was no longer Gorbachev, and it was Bush who turned it down. And it was finally Richard Nixon who had to make an issue of this in 1992. Yeah, I mean they had their problems and he had raised taxes and they had the recession. But, you know, I think the running scared is what did him in in that
election. If he had shown a little more leadership—to say, yeah, these are not easy
times but look at what the stakes are; we have to make that investment. I think he
could have carried it if he had done the leadership. But if instead, you know, your
concept is just simply to manage a corporation so to speak and you’re not willing to
take risks, then I think it was that—it wasn’t just this issue—but that inability to take a
risk for something that might prove to be unpopular that people saw as a weakness
eventually and gave Clinton his opening.

Could you explain the reason for Bush’s reluctance to provide economic aid?
Was he fearful of change?

No, he was not comfortable with change if he wasn’t sure what it was going to be. But
I think ... first of all, what Gorbachev was asking for was not rational. And you
couldn’t place a lot of aid on that. Where the failure was was the failure to see earlier
on that this guy needed some help and you had to find a way to help him whether he
asked for it or not in putting together an organization. Now I would have thought if,
for example, you say: Look, the world doesn’t really need the OECD the way it’s
currently constituted. Why don’t we get an agreement to change this into an
international organization to back transition economies—all of them, Eastern Europe
and the others that had been Communist—to a market system, and we’ll have their
representatives, we’ll have others, and a number of countries will put some solid funds
in it to help this process. Now, if we had started that late ’89 early ’90, I think we
would have had much more substantial thing than saying: OK, IMF do it or World
Bank. They were set up for different purposes and more limited purposes. And nobody
had a road map. You couldn’t ... you really had to put a lot of heads together and you
had to have some way to provide political and, if need be at times, financial support to
do things that were going to be difficult politically, as we’ve seen in Russia. I just
think there wasn’t the imagination to do that at a time when it would have worked. By
’90, late ’91, it was late, but in ’92 he could have helped the reformers a lot by going
along with the money they needed then, and I think that would have passed in the
United States. It was not unpopular. People understood, you know, they were no
longer an enemy; we had spent hundreds of billions on arms—we didn’t need to do
that anymore ... OK, it’s tough but let’s find a way to do it. And it seems to me that
ways could have been found, and you could have pressed the Japanese and Germans
also to do a lot.

In your speech you said the collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitable, and in
your book you said the reasons why it collapsed were all internal. Do you think
the U.S. foreign policy toward the Soviet Union merely guided or perhaps
affected the timing of the collapse of the Soviet Union?

Well, I think ... obviously, some of the things we pushed for to end the Cold War,
such as opening up the country, bringing in democratic processes, supporting the
election process, were things that made the eventual disintegration of the Soviet Union
possible. I mean, as long as the Communist party was in power and we certainly

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favored steps to take them out of power, though we didn’t do it, and if we’d tried to do it with pressure, it wouldn’t have worked. You open up a country and this tends to bring the dictators down—something we didn’t learn in regards to Cuba and we haven’t learned regarding Iran and Iraq. But you’re much more apt to bring them down if you open up the country in Iraq. So in that sense, by opening up the country, encouraging them to open up and so on, we created conditions under which when they could not deal with these other pressures, the state collapsed. So I’m not saying that none of our policies had any relevance. I’m just saying we didn’t bring it about. We didn’t have the power to bring it about. It was brought about internally. Some of these internal forces had been encouraged by the United States and the West in general, not so much by a direct action, although by that too, but by our very existence. After all, as long as we existed as free societies and democratic societies with economies that seemed to work, we were a threat to the Soviet system. And what their task was to try to be more like us without admitting it. And we were really in favor of that. It turned out that they couldn’t. Well, that was their problem, and that’s what I was trying to say in the book.

You said that President Bush and Gorbachev were both in favor of a confederation, a democratic Soviet Union. Why were they not successful in pushing forward that type of Soviet Union?

Well, there were several reasons. One was that the nationalists in several of the republics wanted independence for their own reasons, and the Communists in other republics, once they saw that the Communist party was losing power, wanted independence in order to save themselves and stay in power. This happened in central Asia. You ended up with five dictators in central Asia in those five central Asian countries and keeping the old system primarily open; therefore, with all of their talk of opening up the economies, they were basically a totalitarian political system in the way they controlled things. I think that is why I think Bush was right when he said don’t confuse independence with freedom. In other words, if you have freedom and you want independence, eventually you’re going to get it. But if you take independence under conditions before you get freedom, you could be deprived of freedom for a long time, and that’s happening in a lot of the republics. In fact, in all of them, except the Baltic states, it’s happening. Now, I think we understood that we couldn’t do it for them. It’s something they had to do for themselves. And I’m just saying from the standpoint of U.S. interests that I think it was accurate to feel that it was easier to deal at least with a well disposed Soviet Union that had a monopoly on nuclear weapons than a lot of states, several of which might have gotten them separately. Of course, our big push after it broke up was to make sure that all the nuclear weapons went to one country, that is to Russia. It took a lot of pressure in Ukraine to achieve that and in general the pressure is much more . . . and I think that that also recognizes something we haven’t been clear about since then that, you know, it’s not in our geopolitical interests to vie with Russia for influence in these other areas of the Soviet Union; it just isn’t. It’s just going to create problems. And, you know, if you could be democratic and accepted and Moscow has a certain hegemony and, you
might say, benign rule over these, I don’t think it bothers us at all. In fact, I think the present world where you’ve got so many small states, many of which are not democratic, there is a much greater problem in the long run.

You said ending the Cold War could not be attributed to any single one person, so how would you just briefly define the role of Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush? What credit should each be given for the end of the Cold War, if any?

Well, I think that Reagan in setting up conditions, which were fair and not against the interests of a peaceful Soviet Union, and refusing to reduce arms and end the arms race until the country began to reform, he created conditions that encouraged Gorbachev. In fact, he gave him little choice, if he wanted to reform, but to open up the country and start the reform. Gorbachev deserves the credit for understanding this had to be done and that it was in the interest of his country that it could be done and for having the political skills to pull it off. Bush deserves credit for some very fine clean-up diplomacy in cleaning up the remnants of the Cold War, but not for breaking the back of it.

Thank you.
Vita

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