

[dodis.ch/52917](https://dodis.ch/52917)

United States

*Memorandum<sup>1</sup> for the President of the United States, George H. W. Bush<sup>2</sup>*

## PREPARING FOR THE SIX POWER GERMAN PEACE CONFERENCE

Sensitive

Washington, D. C., 19 February 1990

We are about to enter into the most crucial period for American diplomacy toward Europe since the formation of NATO in 1949. The Six Power discussions on the future of Germany could become the principal forum in which Europe's security framework and the American role in it is determined. The U.S. must find a way to steer this new process on the future of Germany toward an outcome that sanctions full membership for a united Germany in NATO; provides for the continuation of a significant American military presence on German soil; and maintains nuclear deterrence as a pillar of NATO's defense.

Kohl's<sup>3</sup> meeting with Gorbachev<sup>4</sup> clearly showed that Moscow is resigned to German unity. The Six Power talks will, however, give the Soviet Union a chance to shape directly the terms of German unification. Moscow's primary concern will be that there be no further shift – in perception or reality – in the East-West strategic balance. The Soviets are at last feeling the full negative impact of reform in Eastern Europe as government after government there demands the removal of Soviet forces. Germany is, in that sense, the final East-West battleground and has – with its still deep emotional import in the Soviet Union – become a crucial domestic issue for Gorbachev.

When Yegor Ligachev<sup>5</sup> attacked Shevardnadze<sup>6</sup> and Gorbachev for a foreign policy that has allowed the emergence of a united Germany “which looms militarily and economically powerful”, he sounded a chord that resonates in the Soviet political elite, even among those who otherwise support perestroika. The Six Power talks, designed to give Moscow a sense of participation in the resolution of Germany's future and to shore up Gorbachev's position, could instead force his

<sup>1</sup> *Memorandum: Bush Presidential Library CF-00182.20. Written by Brent Scowcroft, [dodis.ch/P57408](https://dodis.ch/P57408).*

<sup>2</sup> *George Herbert Walker Bush (1924–2018), [dodis.ch/P47406](https://dodis.ch/P47406), President of the United States, 20.1.1989–20.1.1993.*

<sup>3</sup> *Helmut Kohl (1930–2017), [dodis.ch/P31852](https://dodis.ch/P31852), Chancellor of the FRG 1.10.1982–27.10.1998.*

<sup>4</sup> *Mikhail Gorbachev (\*1931), [dodis.ch/P31707](https://dodis.ch/P31707), General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 11.3.1985–24.8.1991, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union 25.5.1989–15.3.1990 and President of the Soviet Union 15.3.1990–25.12.1991.*

<sup>5</sup> *Yegor Ligachev (\*1920), [dodis.ch/P57414](https://dodis.ch/P57414), Second Secretary of Communist Party of the Soviet Union 10.3.1985–14.7.1990.*

<sup>6</sup> *Eduard Shevardnadze (1928–2014), [dodis.ch/P54603](https://dodis.ch/P54603), Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union 2.7.1985–26.12.1990.*

145 hand on the details of Germany's future – something that to now he has avoided. Vague ramblings, such as Gorbachev expressed to Kohl, about a united Germany within an all-European security system will in the Six Power context no longer do: Moscow must find some way to prevent the unification of Germany on wholly Western terms. This places us on a probable collision course with the Soviets on the question of the continued full membership of a united Germany in NATO.

The Soviets likely know that a completely neutral Germany is a non-starter with the United States, Britain and the FRG. But for Moscow some weaker form of association for Germany with NATO – perhaps excluding the Bundeswehr from the integrated military command and capping the size of the German armed forces – would be almost as good. The Soviets know that without German forces, NATO's integrated military command would be a shell. They might figure that it would not be long before pressures from the Germans and within the U.S. Congress would force the size of the American presence down and eventually out as well. The Soviets could also seek to negotiate in the Six Power forum their own continued presence in the GDR, or explicitly demand the removal of all U.S. forces from the FRG concurrent with the withdrawal of Soviet forces from East Germany.

One potential consequence of a shift in Moscow's attention to the Six Power talks is that the Soviet leadership may feel less pressure to conclude a CFE agreement. From the Soviet perspective, the Six Power forum can be used to attempt to emasculate the West German army, push U.S. ground forces out of Europe, disrupt the solidarity and viability of NATO itself, and provide political cover for their own withdrawal. These were among their principal objectives in CFE. While CFE retains its uses for Moscow, the Six Power mechanism would now allow the Soviets to pursue many of these key goals in a better forum than CFE, one that gives disproportionate weight to an East Germany dominated by the SPD, and exploits a West German government subject to extreme domestic political turbulence, while excluding lesser Allies who would join with us and London in arguing for stronger German links to NATO. The threat of Soviet reliance on the Six Power vehicle as a surrogate for CFE should be yet another spur for NATO to rapidly conclude a CFE agreement – before the Soviets shift their efforts to the higher-profile talks on Germany.

In any case, the Soviets can be expected to make in the Six Power talks a comprehensive proposal on European security and Germany's role in it. Along with the current GDR leadership, the Soviets will likely insist on severe constraints on a united Germany's association with NATO. Moscow will also use its waning influence in the Warsaw Pact – and play on Czechoslovak, Hungarian, and especially Polish fears of the new Germany – to forge a common front behind its position. (On February 14, Polish Prime Minister Mazowiecki<sup>7</sup> demanded Warsaw be involved in negotiations on German reunification.)

The degree to which this process threatens our interests depends on how carefully we structure the mandate of the Six Power discussions and whether we and our major Allies remain united on a common approach to these profound security

7 Tadeusz Mazowiecki (1927–2013), [dodis.ch/P57378](https://dodis.ch/P57378), Prime Minister of Poland 24.8.1989–12.1.1991.

questions. Our goal should be to keep the focus of the Six Power talks as limited as possible – dealing only with the legal issues related to the end of Four Power rights, the consequences of the absorption of the GDR into the FRG, and the issue of what becomes of forces on the territory of Germany's eastern half. But the Soviets will press hard to widen the mandate so that all questions, including Germany's membership in NATO will be on the table. Should they succeed, you will have a difficult challenge in holding NATO viably together.

As the Six Power talks unfold, Kohl will come under pressure to find a formula for German security that is acceptable to Moscow. The Soviets will use the Six Power mechanism to try and influence German public opinion as well as others in Kohl's coalition – particularly Genscher<sup>8</sup> who will want for domestic political reasons to separate himself from Kohl on the future of European security. The Soviets could argue to an emotional German electorate that a weaker form of association with NATO is a small price to pay for German unity.

The effect of this within the FRG will be to drive German opinion to the left and to strengthen the opposition parties' influence in the domestic debate about unification. The SPD will respond to Moscow's preferences (and those of the SPD's sister party in the GDR) by moving still more to the left, toward a Germany completely out of NATO. This will drive Genscher further left (in search of the new middle ground), which in turn will pull Kohl in the same direction. Kohl would then face a situation in which Moscow, the GDR, the opposition SPD and Greens, and his own Foreign Minister<sup>9</sup> are all calling for a loosening of Germany's ties to NATO.

There is no reason to doubt Kohl's desire to keep his commitment to membership in NATO or his willingness to stand with us on the key issues of Western security. But Kohl will do what he must – even at the expense of NATO and the U.S. link – to become the Chancellor who united Germany. With history beckoning, all else will become for him secondary and negotiable.

Our crucial task will be to find a way to avoid forcing Kohl to choose between unity and full NATO membership, and simultaneously to avert a crisis with Gorbachev over the future of Germany.

Management of relations with the British and French will not be easy either. Mrs. Thatcher<sup>10</sup> will undoubtedly support our position regarding Germany's full membership in NATO but she may try to use the Six Power forum to slow down German unification. And, in any case, Mrs. Thatcher's strongly pro-NATO position will fall on deaf ears in the Federal Republic.

The French will have mixed objectives. Mitterrand<sup>11</sup> may for the present support NATO membership for Germany because the French are concerned both to keep the Bundeswehr constrained within the integrated military command and

<sup>8</sup> Hans-Dietrich Genscher (1927–2016), [dodis.ch/P15414](https://dodis.ch/P15414), Vice-Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the FRG 1.10.1982–17.5.1992.

<sup>9</sup> Hans-Dietrich Genscher.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013), [dodis.ch/P32055](https://dodis.ch/P32055), Prime Minister of the United Kingdom 4.5.1979–28.11.1990.

<sup>11</sup> François Mitterrand (1916–1996), [dodis.ch/P13775](https://dodis.ch/P13775), President of France 21.5.1981–17.5.1995.

147 to legitimize the continuation of nuclear deterrence. But France's voice is weaker because of its own position outside NATO's integrated military command. Moreover, in the longer term, Mitterrand has his own plans for a Confederation of Europe without the United States – including ultimately a new security mechanism – and for strengthening Franco-German bilateral military arrangements. This could give the French incentives to support a loose NATO structure which would, in turn, allow Paris a greater voice as the Atlantic link between the U.S. and NATO weakens. In any case, the Soviets are likely to think that they will find Paris sympathetic and we can expect an intensification of Franco-Soviet diplomacy.

Thus, if we are not careful, the dynamics of domestic politics in the FRG and diplomacy between the Allies and the Soviets could at best leave you and Kohl alone to defend effectively a Germany fully within NATO and with undiminished transatlantic security links.

In order to avoid these pitfalls, we must have a coherent strategy for the Six Power talks that plays on our strengths – the GDR's imminent collapse, Kohl's desire to do the right thing, our leadership role in NATO, and Moscow's lack of real leverage – and minimizes the potential dangers inherent in the Six Power framework. Above all, it is not in our interest to hurry this effort along, though Moscow will press for early talks. It would be a major mistake to proceed to any discussion with the Soviets before we have had an opportunity to forge a common end-game position with the British, French and West Germans. Your meeting with Kohl at Camp David will be a key in this process of consultation, giving you an opportunity to discuss the significant challenges that the Six Power process poses for Western unity and the future of the Alliance. Once we have hammered out a position among the key Allies, NATO must also have a chance to discuss and endorse the Western position.

All the Allies need a part in this process. In Ottawa several Allied ministers, notably the Italians and Dutch, protested their exclusion from the Six Power forum that would affect their security interests as Germany's neighbors. After the Italian Foreign Minister<sup>12</sup> made one such plea for involvement, Genscher turned to him and said, brutally, "You're not in the game." Genscher is wrong.

NATO as an institution needs to forge a bottom line for the outcome of the Six Power discussions on the future of the European security system. One way to do this would be for the Alliance to commission a study by a group of "Wise Men" to consider the future goals and strategy of NATO in light of the political transformation of Europe. Then you could host a Summit meeting of NATO leaders, perhaps in Washington in July immediately after the G-7 meeting in Houston<sup>13</sup>, to endorse this new concept for the Alliance – and Germany's role in it. With this added reinforcement, Kohl would find it easier to resist Soviet and domestic pressures.

In a larger sense, a delay in these Six Power discussions is favorable for us because the longer that German unity proceeds without direct Soviet involvement, the stronger will be the position of the West. As absorption of the GDR into the

12 Gianni De Michelis (\*1940), [dodis.ch/P57415](https://dodis.ch/P57415), Italian Foreign Minister 22.07.1989–28.06.1992.

13 Handwritten note: interesting idea??

148 FRG becomes a *fait accompli*, Soviet leverage to reshape the new FRG will decline. It is worth noting that Kohl has managed so far, including during his visit last weekend to Moscow, to move German unity along while holding fast to his promise to keep the reunified Germany in NATO. Kohl does not himself seem to be pushing for early Six Power discussions – in your recent telephone conversation he appeared to foresee the first Six Power Ministerial meeting taking place sometime this summer<sup>14</sup>.

Ideally, no meetings of any kind would take place within the Six Power framework until after the elections in the GDR on March 18<sup>15</sup>. We would simply say that the GDR's government is not legitimate and cannot speak for the German people residing there, and that we are preparing a united Western position for the talks. Indeed, we should try to delay any real discussion of security arrangements in this forum until the GDR is so weak that the Six, in fact, dissolves into Five as Germany unites.

At the present time, the Modrow<sup>16</sup> government is nothing but a second voice for Moscow. And after the East German elections, should the SPD win as expected, the new GDR government will argue for German neutrality. But with the passage of time – and if East Germany is simply absorbed into the FRG, the GDR government will cease to exist. Then Kohl would speak authoritatively on security arrangements for all of Germany which is, of course, our best bet.

Finally, the Administration needs a breathing spell to formulate a position for what could be the most important set of discussions of European security in the postwar period. It is critical that Dick Cheney<sup>17</sup> and Colin Powell<sup>18</sup> be involved because Six (or Five) Power negotiations on Germany's external security arrangements will cut to the heart of NATO and ultimately American defense strategy.

As Manfred Woerner<sup>19</sup> said to you at Camp David, we are entering the end-game of the Cold War and your own role will be decisive. The United States and the West must be impeccably prepared so that when the end-game is over, the North Atlantic Alliance and the U.S. position in Europe remain the vital instruments of peace and stability that we inherited from our predecessors.

<sup>14</sup> *Handwritten note:* Don't recall this.

<sup>15</sup> *Handwritten note:* Correct according to JRB.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Modrow (\*1928), [dodis.ch/P54796](https://dodis.ch/P54796), Chairman of the GDR Council of Ministers 13.11.1989–12.4.1990.

<sup>17</sup> Dick Cheney (\*1941), [dodis.ch/P57391](https://dodis.ch/P57391), United States Secretary of Defense 21.3.1989–28.6.1992.

<sup>18</sup> Colin L. Powell (\*1937), [dodis.ch/P57416](https://dodis.ch/P57416), Chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff 1.10.1989–30.9.1992.

<sup>19</sup> Manfred Wörner (1934–1994), [dodis.ch/P57417](https://dodis.ch/P57417), Secretary General of NATO 1.7.1988–12.8.1994.