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**Kristina Spohr. "Precluded or Precedent-Setting? The 'NATO Enlargement Question' in the Triangular Bonn-Washington-Moscow Diplomacy of 1990-1991." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14:4 (Fall 2012): 4-54. DOI: 10.1162/JCWS\_a\_00275. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/JCWS\\_a\\_00275](http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00275)**

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The myth of Western betrayal of Russia in allowing eastward enlargement of NATO is debunked in Kristina Spohr's article with a finality apt to convince anyone but the most conspiracy-minded Russian nationalists. Her meticulously researched article, which is sensitive to perceptions and misperceptions, analyzes and interprets multi-archival evidence with a thoroughness that leaves little room for re-interpretation regardless of what additional pieces of evidence might come to light. The argument is, if anything, over-documented, and the "net evaluation," elaborated at great length, (47) may be summed up in a sentence, such as: The possibility of NATO's extension beyond German borders was not discussed, much less subject to a formal or informal agreement, at a time when none of the parties concerned regarded such extension likely or desirable.

Having laid to rest the "NATO Enlargement Question," within the context of the "Cold War 'German question'," (39) Spohr does not attempt to address the different question of the post-Cold War origins of the enlargement, which is part of the larger question of the emergence of European security architecture. But the article is important for the understanding of the "spirit of the time"—the period after the Berlin Wall went down but when the Soviet Union still existed—when "views on the future shape of European security architecture remained inchoate," while "all the protagonists had to deal with a dynamic situation in which developments seemed to be speeding up" (39, 51-52).

To start with, the Warsaw Pact was still there, too, as was NATO, while doubts were growing about their utility as well as viability, though much faster in the formerly communist countries that had been coerced into their alliance than among the Western members who had entered theirs voluntarily. While a bewildering array of architectural designs were being drawn and publicized by those not responsible for their implementation, the CSCE model of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in

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Europe was the frontrunner. Initially favored by both Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, the CSCE seemed well suited as a design, having contributed to the winding down of the Cold War with Soviet cooperation.

For those in charge of policy, the possibility of the Soviet Union remaining as a great power was a key consideration. It was, of course, sine qua non for Gorbachev, who had been trying to reform the Soviet Union in hopes of invigorating it. His Western counterparts regarded the preservation of the reforming state, with which they had started to dismantle the Cold War order, a necessary precondition for the building of a new order. But as the multiethnic Soviet state started eroding from within, they had to take into account the possibility that Gorbachev's policies would be reversed or the seemingly lesser likelihood of the state's break-up.

When, contrary to the prevailing expectations, the unification of Germany became the first rather than the last stage in the progressing unification of Europe, the four powers formally responsible for Germany's future had to deal with that issue while the pace of the unification was being determined by what the German people, particularly in East Germany, wanted. Attesting that the inflated 'German question' had in effect been already resolved, other peoples—more conspicuously in Eastern than in Western Europe—did not view the prospect of unified Germany with alarm. For East Europeans, after they had gotten rid of their communist regimes, the priority was getting the Soviets out. They started creating accomplished facts that shaped Europe's evolving security environment.

Czechoslovakia and Hungary were the first to conclude on their own initiative agreements leading to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from their territories. The troops were already on their way out while the withdrawal of those in East Germany was still being discussed by West German chancellor Helmut Kohl and Gorbachev. But the East Europeans' desire to terminate the unwanted Soviet military presence did not translate into the desire to join NATO. While the future of Germany in NATO was being negotiated, the majority of people in the formerly communist countries, while wishing to leave the Warsaw Pact, did not wish to join NATO; their preference was neutrality. Václav Havel, the Czechoslovak dissident turned president, who made close cooperation with Germany his foremost priority, had advocated the dissolution of NATO along with the Warsaw Pact, before starting to favor the preservation of the former though not the latter while still envisioning an overarching structure built on the CSCE.<sup>1</sup>

Important though the unification of Germany was in accelerating the process of European unification, it did not serve as blueprint for Europe's security architecture. The CFE negotiations, intended to decide the future deployment of conventional forces on Europe, were still going on, with the Soviet military doing their best to obstruct them. Both NATO

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<sup>1</sup> Vojtech Mastny, *Reassuring NATO: Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Western Alliance* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 1997), pp. 42-47.

and the Warsaw Pact were considered necessary to bring the negotiations to a successful end. Although the Warsaw Pact was breaking up, NATO membership was “neither being offered nor being sought” (46). The treaties that sealed Germany’s unification presupposed the integrity of the Soviet Union, particularly the inclusion in it of the Baltic countries. Although their striving for independence presaged their separation, the disintegration of the rest of the Soviet Union was not a foregone conclusion.

Given the uncertainty, how well did the policies of the different protagonists anticipate what was actually coming? To help answer that question, Spohr’s article provides a wealth of evidence, as does her earlier survey of literature about German unification, and such path-breaking studies as Mark Kramer’s on the Soviet Union’s German policy and Frédéric Bozo’s on that of France’s President François Mitterrand.<sup>2</sup> In evaluating their achievements, comparison between Kohl and Gorbachev is instructive, as is the different impact made by other protagonists—President George H.W. Bush, Baker, Mitterrand, and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, not to forget the West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher.

Kohl comes out as not only the consummate politician but also the most far-sighted one. Beyond the goal of his country’s unification, he was pursuing a policy best prepared for different eventualities. He provided generous economic support to the Soviet Union to help ensure its survival. At the same time, he secured Germany’s membership in NATO in case the Soviet Union or its successor would re-emerge as a threat. But most importantly, he acted to reassure Germany’s European members in both the East and the West by preparing the unified country’s integration in the forthcoming European Union, which had been designed to prevent any of its members from becoming threats to each other.

Gorbachev, by contrast, was not only a poor politician but, “crucially, [also] seemed to lack his own political conception of Germany’s fate” (23). Spohr is not alone in wondering why he “had not pressed for any assurances or security guarantees regarding NATO’s future size and nature” when “security features of a unified Germany and Europe continued to be open questions that still needed to be resolved” (29). But Gorbachev’s aide Anatolii Cherniaev knew already in 1989 that the Soviet leader had “no concept of where we are going.”<sup>3</sup> Certainly, his various conceptions of German unification, including the one presuming that “a unified Germany could adopt a ‘nonaligned’ status, like India or China,” (28) were notably lacking in coherence.

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<sup>2</sup> Kristina Spohr, “German Unification: Between Official History, Academic Scholarship, and Political Memoirs,” *Historical Journal* 43, no. 3 (Sep., 2000): 869-88; Mark Kramer, “The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia,” *Washington Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (April 2009): 29-62; Frédéric Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification* (New York: Berghahn, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Note by Cherniaev 2 May 1989, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001): 17.

The United States—the center of attention for most authors—appears to have been purposefully pursuing a long-term policy to make the European security system what it has eventually become, but the appearance is deceptive. Quite apart from Bush’s self-confessed aversion to the ‘vision thing,’ Washington came to have a “settled position” (41) only in the narrow sense of insisting on the applicability of Article 5 of the NATO treaty for the whole of Germany—no major accomplishment. The article, providing for mutual defense guarantees, has since been invoked only once—in 2001 by NATO’s European members to offer help in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, only to be ignored by the George W. Bush administration.

The American policy was prudent in preparing for Europe with or without the Soviet Union, but did not decisively influence the construction of the continent’s new security order. Not only does Spohr make clear that the Kohl-Gorbachev deal was more consequential than the non-deal between Gorbachev and Baker, but so too were the accomplished facts that East Germans and their eastern neighbors were creating by themselves on the ground. Moreover, the United States was a bystander in the process of European integration, from which the new security order ultimately emerged.

Arguably, Mitterrand was more influential than the Americans, though not because of his failed architectural project for a European confederation that he had proposed in early 1990 with the intent of including in it the Soviet Union while excluding the United States. Initially in agreement with Gorbachev on the need to thwart the rush to German unification, by March he found it expedient to join with Kohl in starting an alternative policy that aimed to transform the European Political Cooperation into the security arm of the European Union. But more relevant to its security was Mitterrand’s deal with Kohl whereby France agreed to support the inevitable German unification in return for Kohl’s assent to a future monetary union, intended to blunt united Germany’s economic predominance in a more deeply integrated Europe, though in the longer term achieving the opposite.

Among the principals, Thatcher—the most principled opponent of German unification because of her obsession with balance of power—was least successful in affecting the way unification was accomplished. In 1989, she had tried to privately reassure Gorbachev that “Britain and Western Europe are not interested in the unification of Germany,” urging him to “disregard . . . the words written in the NATO communiqué,” and claiming that Bush had entrusted her with the mission to tell him that his own views coincided with hers.<sup>4</sup> But in the end she acquiesced in the outcome she resented, having to rely on NATO performing its obsolescent Cold War function of keeping the Germans down, the Russians out, and the Americans in.

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<sup>4</sup> Record of Gorbachev-Thatcher conversation, 23 September 1989, “The Thatcher-Gorbachev Conversations,” ed. Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 422, 12 April 2013, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB422/>

Spohr is most illuminating in analyzing the role of Genscher who, though repeatedly overruled by Kohl, may have been in a position to make the myth of Western betrayal into reality in other people's minds. His was an exemplary case of not merely "Zweizüngigkeit" (literally, "speaking with two tongues" or deliberate ambiguity) but of what might be termed "Mehrzüngigkeitsgefahr"—the peril of talking too much about many things without making clear enough what they meant. "NATO would not expand to the East," he said, and "if Soviet troops stayed behind in the GDR, this would not be our problem," but "concerning the non-expansion of NATO, this should apply generally" (30). No wonder that "Genscher's utterances . . . may well have fostered a Soviet expectation of Western restraint and concession-making in security policy questions," (31) even though there is no evidence they did.

In conclusion, with all due respect to these fascinating individuals, it must be said that none of them was in a position to determine Europe's future security architecture. Unified Germany was a foundation stone in the edifice, but the building of it that followed is quite another story. Although explaining it was not Spohr's purpose, her article is a model of how to do so.

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