Nothing has symbolized the final end of the postwar order as much as the unification of Germany: Former allies relinquished their rights from the period of occupation, Germans regained full sovereignty over their internal and external affairs, the Soviet Union removed its troops from Germany and Poland, and the division of Europe was overcome. My lecture carries the subtitle “Tribute to American Friends.” It needs no lengthy explanation that President Bush and Secretary of State Baker were Germany’s most crucial allies in those decisive months. The United States, more than any other Western government, could assess the global dimension of Gorbachev’s foreign policies and their impact on the restructuring of postwar Europe.

The opening of the wall on November 9, 1989 came as an unforeseen, eruptive event that had to spark worries among Germany’s neighbors about the established European security architecture. Stability had always been a top issue in German politics. West Germany itself had, in fact, exercised a policy of self-restraint for decades. In the “Letter on German Unity” of August 1970, which the West German government delivered to the Soviets in the context of the signing of the Moscow Treaty, it was stated that it would be West Germany’s “political objective to work for a state of peace in Europe in which the German nation will recover its unity in free self-determination.” This meant that West Germany was giving first priority to the state of peace in Europe—you might call it our sacrifice for stability.

I wish to mention the friendship, fairness, and assistance of all those Americans who shared our concerns and enthusiasm, who instilled the process with great ideas, and who worked hard without giving themselves a break during these few months of long days and short nights: Bob Blackwill, Bob Kimmitt, Condoleezza Rice, Denis Ross, Ray Seitz, Margaret Tutwiler, and the man who normally ranks at the end of the alphabetical list, but who surely was the greatest strategic thinker during this eventful time, namely Bob Zoellick, with whom I worked most closely, and in a spirit of trust that I would call unique in my diplomatic career.
Therefore, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Federal Republic considered it essential that unification should proceed within a stable European framework. President von Weizsäcker echoed Willy Brandt’s words: “Now what belongs together is growing together,” but he also added a warning against “mushrooming growth.” Chancellor Helmut Kohl has been criticized for presenting the idea of a Vertragsgemeinschaft, a confederation between the two German states. But could he really have gone any further at this juncture? Then, all of a sudden, the call for freedom in East Germany became a call for unity. The East German demonstrators, who had originally been shouting “We are the people,” began shouting “We are one people.” Now we feared that European stability might be jeopardized more by “going too slowly than by going too fast.”

The events of November 9, 1989 obviously gave rise to grave concerns in the Kremlin. Ironically, it had been perestroika and Gorbachev’s public warning in East Berlin—“Life punishes those who fall behind”—that had made the peaceful revolution in East Germany possible. However, the Soviet leadership’s sympathy for the upheavals in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had its limits. The safety of the over 300,000 Soviet soldiers and their families could not be compromised. Under these circumstances, the Soviet side made it very clear that it wished the GDR to continue to exist as an independent state within the sphere of influence of the Warsaw Pact. In hindsight, Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze admitted that this initial Soviet attitude was far removed from Moscow’s eventual position during the last lap of the Two Plus Four process. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze were ready to accept German unification only in a long-term perspective. The division of Germany ran contrary to the political ideals of perestroika, and there was a basic moral feeling that did not accept the division of a country and a people for political reasons. Shevardnadze asked: Which Germany better suits our interests—a divided one that stockpiles bitter and potentially explosive insults, one that harbors a dangerous inferiority complex and a feeling of humiliation, one that in no way lives up to its intellectual, economic, creative, and cultural potential, or a united, democratic Germany that takes its place amongst those sovereign over their own destiny?

From the very beginning it was clear that Gorbachev and Shevardnadze would not oppose German unification. Gorbachev recognized his dilemma: He would not be able to explain it to his people if he lost
the GDR. Yet he would not be able to keep the GDR afloat without West Germany’s assistance.

Bonn had been assured of political support from Washington at a very early stage. I refer to the speech of President Bush in Mainz in May 1989 and to his interview in *The New York Times* just fifteen days before the Berlin Wall came down, in which he said, “I don’t share the concern that some European countries have about a reunified Germany.” Already in the summer of 1989 we sensed a reorientation of U.S. foreign policy. Jim Baker arrived at the State Department in early 1989, at the time of bitter conflict within NATO over the modernization of short-range nuclear missiles. Initially, Baker was not happy with the German position, but he was open to listening, and he eventually helped to work out a compromise at the NATO summit in May that postponed modernization.

In his speech in Mainz, President Bush described the United States and Germany as “partners in leadership.” What seemed, at first, just a flattering remark was, in fact, an early, calculated recognition that Germany would play a key role in the further development of East-West relations, especially with regard to the Soviet Union. The offer of “partners in leadership” was made to ensure that the United States would maintain its option of influencing the future course of events, since developments in Europe could have an incalculable effect on the American role in Europe. Given the turbulence in Eastern Europe, the American government realized that its own role on the European continent might be at stake. In his speech to the NATO council in Brussels on December 4, 1989, President Bush made his position very clear: “Of course, we have all supported German reunification for four decades.” The American President was referring to nothing less than a legal obligation. In the Paris Agreements of October 1954, the three Western allies of the Federal Republic had pledged to bring about the reunification of Germany through peaceful means. And for decades its NATO partners had supported German unity with stock phrases in their communiqués. NATO’s program of détente, the Harmel Report of 1967, emphasized the functional aspect of a satisfactory solution to the German question for the peace process in Europe as a whole.

For all his enthusiasm, however, President Bush stipulated an important condition in his Brussels speech of early December 1989: A unified Germany must be a member of NATO. The United States
strongly supported unification, because it made it more likely that the German people would voluntarily stay within Western structures. The stipulation of united Germany’s membership in NATO also made unification more palatable for Great Britain and France since remaining American troops on the continent were viewed as a counterbalance to a stronger Germany. By supporting German unification, the United States could best safeguard its presence in Europe and influence the shaping of the East-West process. This was the attitude that the United States displayed at the Malta summit of December 2–3, 1989, where Bush left Gorbachev in no doubt about his interest in German unification.

By the end of 1989, the political landscape of Europe had changed. The Berlin Wall had come down, Poland had a freely elected government, Hungary had declared itself a republic, Václav Havel had been elected president of Czechoslovakia, and the Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, had been shot. Two primary concerns determined German foreign policy at the end of the year. First, what type of format was suitable for negotiating German unification? Second, how could the question of united Germany’s membership in NATO, which matched West German security interests, be resolved so that the Soviet Union would not withhold approval? Under no circumstances did we wish to seek a peace treaty. This was an outdated concept, and the Treaty of Versailles had given the term a negative connotation. Considering Germany’s achievements in the forty-five years after the war, it was altogether inappropriate. The key issue was: How could we push through the membership of a united Germany in NATO?

In a speech at the Protestant Academy in Tutzing on January 31, 1990, German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher took the initiative. He called for NATO membership for united Germany and rejected the notion of a neutral Germany. However, he added an essential reservation to the demand for NATO membership: “Notions that the part of Germany that today constitutes the GDR should be drawn into the military structures of NATO would block attempts at getting closer.” He continued: “It is NATO’s task to clarify unequivocally that whatever may happen to the Warsaw Pact, there will be no extension of NATO territory to the East, i.e. nearer the borders of the Soviet Union. This guarantee will be significant for the Soviet Union and its attitude.” He also spoke of the future role of both alliances. They would shift from confrontation to cooperation and should become elements of cooperative security structures in the whole of Europe.
Genscher’s Tutzing Formula constituted a sound approach that balanced the security interests of all concerned, but it also created misgivings in Germany. In all parties, there were doubts that Gorbachev, beleaguered as he was by the conservatives in his own party, could permit NATO membership for the GDR. To avoid any misinterpretations, the German Foreign Office had distributed advance copies of the Tutzing speech in English, French, and Russian to the foreign ministers’ offices in London, Paris, Moscow, and Washington. While Genscher was speaking in Tutzing, I flew to Washington for talks with Bob Zoellick and Denis Ross about the proposed NATO formula. They warmly welcomed the Tutzing speech; they even seemed quite relieved. As far as the format of the negotiations was concerned, they proposed a “mechanism of six”: Negotiations on German unification should be conducted between the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, France, the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain. This made sense, since the four victorious powers not only had rights, but also responsibilities with regard to Germany as a whole, and to Berlin. The following day, Genscher arrived in Washington for talks with Baker. He suggested that the proposed mechanism of six should be called “Two Plus Four.” It was important to erase all memories of the humiliating negotiations in Geneva in 1954. For this reason, neither “Four Plus Two” nor a “Council of Six” nor “Four Plus Zero” were acceptable. The Baker-Genscher meeting strengthened the personal bond between these two very different men, much to the advantage of the unification process.

Now that the West Germans had clearly expressed themselves in favor of united Germany’s membership in NATO, the Americans actively promoted the process.

Baker immediately swung into action. He filled in British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd and French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas and briefed journalists on his flight to Moscow on February 7. In Moscow, he sought to convince Gorbachev and Shevardnadze that both German states and the four victorious powers should sit down to negotiations at one table. Baker pointed out that it would be “unrealistic” to imagine that an economic power like Germany would remain neutral once it was united. In fact, he warned General Secretary Gorbachev of the danger that a united Germany might pose, if it were to make arrangements for its own security. Would the Soviets like to see a reunited Germany outside NATO without U.S. troops, and potentially in possession of its own nuclear weapons, or would they prefer a united Germany firmly integrated in NATO, with the
guarantee that NATO would not extend its territory eastwards by even a centimeter? Baker’s persistent lobbying carried the weight and authority of the leading Western power. In a way, he took on the position of a bailsman or trustee vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, which was very important in this situation.

Baker left a three-page letter drafted by his adviser, Denis Ross, with the German ambassador in Moscow to prepare Kohl for his talks with Gorbachev. In a personal letter that Bush sent to Kohl prior to Kohl’s meeting with Gorbachev, the American President also assured his West German counterpart that he could count on the support of his American allies in the German question. But at the same time, Bush urged Kohl to insist on united Germany remaining within NATO when he met with Mikhail Gorbachev. At a meeting in the Kremlin on February 10, 1990, Chancellor Kohl received Gorbachev’s consent to go ahead with unification. As the Soviet news agency TASS put it, “there was no difference of opinion that the Germans themselves must resolve the question of the unity of the German nation and that they themselves decide in what time frame, at what speed, and under what conditions they wish to bring about unity.”

On their return from Moscow, Genscher and his aides immediately flew on to Ottawa for the “Open Skies” conference, a meeting of NATO and Warsaw Pact foreign ministers. At the traditional “Deutschland breakfast” that preceded NATO conferences, Foreign Ministers Genscher, Dumas, Baker, and Hurd agreed on the framework for future negotiations on Germany. Baker and Genscher then individually met with Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. They faced a hesitant Soviet colleague, surprised by the speed of the Western initiative, and obviously without any directions from Moscow. Shevardnadze interrupted the talks with Baker and Genscher...
several times for cross-checks with Moscow on the phone. He informed us about the Polish request for a final recognition of the border between Poland and Germany. At 3:00 p.m. in the Canadian capital, all six foreign ministers met for a photo session and presented their agreement to begin the Two Plus Four talks on German unification.

The news spread like wildfire in the conference hall in Ottawa. It did not meet with approval in all quarters. The Italian Foreign Minister, de Michelis, and his Dutch colleague, van den Broek, were extremely upset and demanded that any negotiations on German unity must also involve them. Genscher had great difficulty in clarifying that the number of participants—besides both concerned German states—had necessarily to be restricted to those states that, as a result of the war and postwar period, had rights as well as responsibilities with regard to Germany as a whole. Undoubtedly, most NATO partners felt steamrolled by the events. The Canadian hosts complained that history had been made in their capital and they had not been informed in advance. The American diplomat Bob Blackwill quoted a Canadian who said: “We felt like a piano player on the ground floor of a whorehouse, who has some sort of idea of what is going on in the upper floors.”

Of course, we had no intention to offend anyone. We were under colossal pressure to keep up the momentum that we had gained in Moscow. Germany’s main negotiating goals were as follows: no peace treaty; termination of the rights and responsibilities of the Four Powers; full sovereignty of united Germany; German membership in NATO; withdrawal of all Soviet forces from Germany within a foreseeable, fixed time period; finalization of the border issue between Poland and united Germany; and no “singularization” of
Germany. The non-singularization of Germany meant that Germany should not be different from any other state after unification. To refer to a well-known quote from Orwell, “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others,” it meant that Germany could not accept a variant of that saying, “All animals are equal, but one is unequal.”

The first meeting of the Two Plus Four process took place on March 14, 1990 in Bonn, only four days ahead of the first democratic elections in the GDR. It was a meeting at the level of the political directors of the foreign ministries: Dieter Kastrup (FRG), Ernst Krabatsch (GDR, later replaced by Gerold von Braunmühl), Bertrand Dufourcq (France), Juli Kvizinsky (USSR), John Weston (Britain), and Robert Zoellick (U.S.). The negotiators were all experienced diplomats supported by outstanding legal and security experts. From a technical point of view, there seemed to be no difficulty drafting a text that would resolve all issues. The delegations, in fact, started drafting texts, virtually ignoring unresolved political issues, and they got very far.

As Shevardnadze put it, the “mother of all questions” was the future military status of Germany. The Soviet leadership had to find solutions that were acceptable to the opponents of perestroika and palatable to the Soviet people. Hard-core Soviet conservatives were under the illusion that they could use the fact that Soviet troops were still stationed in the GDR to dictate the terms of reunification, insist on Germany leaving NATO, and create a confederation of the German states. No Soviet General Secretary could afford to disregard public opinion at home. The people had suffered a very high death toll in World War II. At first glance, the idea of a united Germany in NATO appeared as if the outcome of World War II were being reversed. How was the collapse of the postwar order of Yalta and Potsdam, for which the Soviet Union had fought, to be justified?

Because this critical mass of security aspects overburdened the original Two Plus Four negotiating forum, German unification was not only discussed at the Two Plus Four venues—namely Bonn, Berlin, Paris, and Moscow—but also followed up on in many parallel meetings and conferences, including Windhoek (Namibia), Geneva, Brest, Münster, Washington, Turnberry, Copenhagen, Dublin, Houston, London, and especially Archys. The frequent meetings between Genscher and Shevardnadze did not cause any irritation amongst the Western Allies; quite the contrary. The United States itself participated in “this
circus with many rings,” as Zoellick described it. Indeed, in the Washington-Moscow-Bonn triangle a transparency and cooperation was achieved that would have been unthinkable before.

The Washington summit between Bush and Gorbachev at the end of May 1990 brought to life the question of alliance membership, on whose outcome everything hung. President Bush broached the alliance question directly: “Why don’t we let the Germans decide?” Gorbachev’s totally unexpected and astonishing answer was: “That is a good idea. Let the Germans decide!” Zoellick remembers that Gorbachev’s entourage, Falin in particular, was horrified. Groundwork for this breakthrough had already been laid during Baker’s February visit to Moscow. The night before Baker met Gorbachev, Zoellick had had an ingenious idea. He, Denis Ross, Ray Seitz, and Condoleezza Rice drafted nine points to be presented to Gorbachev by Baker. These nine points touched upon U.S.-Soviet ties, and summarized the conceptual work of the political directors. It was a condensation of arguments that Gorbachev would have never received through his own apparatus. But the job was far from being done. Would Gorbachev stick to his guns? Could he survive the Communist Party Congress having made such a commitment? Now each side had to make efforts to present the other with suitable arguments, with an eye to the impending 28th Communist Party Congress in mid-July. Tarassenko and Stepanov, Shevardnadze’s closest aides, revealed to us the paradox of the strategic thinking in the Soviet Foreign Ministry: “If we go too fast there will be no unification, and if we go too slowly there will be no unification either!” What this meant was that one had to reduce the speed in view of the sensitivities among Russians, while at the same time stepping on the gas so that opponents would not have time to put up a concerted front against the unification treaty.
Meetings in Turnberry, Brest, Münster, and London aimed at supporting Gorbachev publicly; diplomacy turned into a public-relations exercise. NATO foreign ministers sent the “Message of Turnberry,” extending a “hand of friendship” to the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries. Genscher and Baker had been lobbying for this message among their colleagues. What Baker told his NATO colleagues contains a piece of wisdom that has gradually petered out in the two decades since unification:

Moving in this direction does not require a revolution in our thinking. It just requires that we adapt to new realities and build upon our proven collective defense structure a broader notion of security. This notion must recognize that NATO cannot only prevent war but can also build peace. And that the way to build the peace is to reassure the Central and Eastern Europeans and the Soviets that they will not be left out of the new Europe.

The “Hand of Friendship” thus sent an early signal, allowing the Soviet leadership to adjust to the new developments well before the 28th Communist Party Congress.

After a long day of consultations in Brest on June 11, Shevardnadze took Genscher to his brother’s grave. Akai Shevardnadze and 230 other soldiers had fallen while defending the garrison in Brest in the first days of Hitler’s aggression against Russia. The joint laying of flowers at the grave was broadcast nationwide by Soviet television several times that day, and it sent a thoughtful message to the Russian people. Genscher had selected Münster for their next venue, a city that in a special way represented peace and justice and the right to freely choose one’s alliance with others. In October 1648, the Westphalian Peace Treaty had been concluded here, ending the Thirty Years’ War in Europe.

When the 28th Communist Party Congress met from July 2 to 13, Gorbachev not only survived, but actually managed to consolidate his position. It is very clear that the declaration of the sixteen NATO heads of state and government at the London summit that took place on July 5–6 had strengthened Gorbachev’s hand. There can be no doubt that developments would have taken a completely different course if Gorbachev’s opponents had gotten their way at the party congress. Only a few days after his political victory, Gorbachev
gave the green light to proceed with unification during his talks with Kohl in Moscow and the Caucasus on July 15-16. The agreement covered all the points that had been developed during the Two Plus Four negotiations. The understanding about the status of the combined German armed forces and the future size of the Bundeswehr, however, were new elements.

The Soviet side now wished to step up the pace so that the treaty could be signed at the meeting of the foreign ministers scheduled to take place in Moscow on September 12, 1990. They came within a hair’s breadth of not signing the treaty at all. When London’s political director, John Weston, insisted that exercises of foreign troops must be allowed on the former territory of the GDR despite the fact that the relevant passage in the treaty had already been drafted—namely “that foreign troops can neither be … stationed nor deployed in this part of Germany”—the Soviets called off the signing scheduled for the next day. Eventually, this problem was also resolved, and on September 12 the four Allied Powers and the two German states signed the Two Plus Four Treaty relinquishing all Allied occupation rights over the two Germanys and Berlin and thus paving the way for German unification.

On the fringes of a special meeting of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in New York on October 1, 1990, the foreign ministers of the Two Plus Four process signed a document suspending the operation of Quadripartite Rights and Responsibilities. Thus, de facto, Germany became a sovereign state. One day later the foreign ministers of the CSCE states took note of the Two Plus Four document. It was a meaningful event, because it implied that German unification had taken place with the approval of
the signatory states to the Final Act of Helsinki. On October 3, 1990, the GDR acceded to the Federal Republic of Germany according to Article 23 of the Basic Law. The United States was the first of the Four Powers to ratify the Two Plus Four Treaty. Ratification in Moscow, however, was the subject of a bitter controversy, and it was by no means certain. Before Ambassador Terechov handed over the Soviet instrument of ratification on March 15, 1991, Erich Honecker, the former head of the East German communist party and government, was taken from the GDR to a hospital in Moscow by a Soviet military aircraft, an important concession to Gorbachev’s foes in the Duma. This was most probably the last act in the Soviet exercise of power as an occupation force, because with the deposit of the last instrument of ratification Germany had attained full sovereignty over its internal and external affairs.