

BRITAIN, BERLIN, GERMAN UNIFICATION, AND THE FALL OF THE SOVIET EMPIRE

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Introduction

The contribution of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) historians to commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the peaceful (except in Romania) revolutions in central and Eastern Europe that not only precipitated the fall of the Soviet empire and unification of Germany, but also contributed to the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself, consists of two volumes of Documents on British Policy Overseas (DBPO). One, on Berlin in the Cold War was published in 2008 and has been reviewed by Roger Morgan in the journal *International Affairs*.¹ The other, on Britain and the unification of Germany, was published in September 2009. Both volumes were launched at an FCO conference in London on 16 October. The selected documents (in handsomely produced hardback books with a DVD for the *Berlin in the Cold War* volume) cover the Berlin blockade (1948–9), the building of the Berlin Wall (1961), the preceding Berlin crises initiated by Nikita Khrushchev's public ultimatum to end the military occupation of Berlin (November 1958), the fall of the Wall (November 1989), the unification of Germany (October 1990), and preparations for the summit meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) (November 1990) that closed down the Cold War by

¹ *Annual Report of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 85 (2009), 639–40.

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adopting the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. The historians Patrick Salmon, Keith Hamilton, and Stephen Twigge have made a judicious selection, although they might have covered more extensively the 1970–2 negotiations on Berlin, Germany, and Ostpolitik to which Britain made a major contribution. The documents selected include short messages that give the flavour of how ministers and officials deal with crises, and longer term reflective analyses and policy recommendations. There are pithy, revealing marginalia such as, ‘at least we’ve got him off unification’—by Charles (now Lord) Powell, the Prime Minister’s foreign affairs Private Secretary commenting on 12 December 1989 on a letter of 5 December from Sir Christopher Mallaby, ambassador in Bonn, about future political and security arrangements in Europe. In fact Sir Christopher was careful to warn his readers, also in this letter, that the wishes of people in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and the Soviet ‘bottom line’ might lead to early unification.²

The excellent summaries and two prefaces give a lucid, incisive account of how British ministers and diplomats handled the ‘German question’ from the early days of the Cold War until it was answered by unification in 1990. Although the Soviet Union’s departure from the Allied Control Council in Berlin in March 1948 confirmed that the wartime alliance between Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union was at an end, their Quadripartite Rights and Responsibilities (QRR) for Berlin and Germany as a whole, within its frontiers of 1937, were extinguished only by unification in 1990. Throughout this period successive Labour and Conservative governments gave consistent public support for the establishment of one unified liberal democratic German state until Mrs (as she then was) Thatcher attempted to thwart unification in the autumn of 1989. This review article will take some of the newly edited sources as a starting point and combine them with other material and personal experience of British policy on Germany, East–West relations, and European integration, gained not least during service as Deputy Head of the British Mission in East Germany from 1987 to 1990. The article highlights some of the main positions and problems of British, German, French, American, and Soviet policies towards German unification.

² Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 65.

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British Government Policy on Germany (1946–89)

In 1946 Foreign Office legal advisers certified that as a consequence of the Allies' declaration of 5 June 1945, Germany as a state and German nationality still existed. In January 1948 Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin stated in the House of Commons that 'the UK stood for a united Germany, not a dismembered or divided Germany'.³ Prime Minister Attlee announced in Parliament on 1 March 1948 that Britain's aim was 'to bring Germany back into the family of nations, unified on a democratic basis as Western civilisation understands the term'.⁴ Later that year, as the blockade of Berlin got under way, Bevin insisted, again in Parliament, that 'the UK was still in favour of the economic and political unity of Germany, established on proper principles—genuine freedom of speech, real liberty of the person, and unhampered movement of men and goods throughout Germany'.⁵ The legal and political positions were set out in Article 7 of the *Convention on Relations between the Three Powers and the Federal Republic of Germany* which came into force when the occupation ended in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) (but not Berlin) in 1955. This treaty obligation, which was also the formal position of NATO on the German question, is worth quoting in full because the Prime Minister was accused of breaking it in 1990:

The Signatory States are agreed that an essential aim of their common policy is a peace settlement for the whole of Germany, freely negotiated between Germany and her former enemies, which should lay the foundation for a lasting peace. They further agree that the final determination of the boundaries of Germany must await such a settlement. Pending the peace settlement, the Signatory States will co-operate to achieve, by peaceful means, their common aim of a re-unified Germany enjoying a liberal-democratic constitution, like that

³ Foreign and Commonwealth Office (hereafter FCO), *Selected Documents on Germany and the Question of Berlin, 1944–1961*, presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (London, 1961), 103.

⁴ Quoted from Adolf M. Birke, *Britain and Germany: Historical Patterns of a Relationship* (London, 1987), 26.

⁵ FCO, *Selected Documents on Germany*, 103.

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of the Federal Republic, and integrated within the European community. The Three Powers will consult with the Federal Republic on all matters involving the exercise of their rights relating to Germany as a whole.⁶

This position was confirmed repeatedly by the UK and NATO during the Berlin crises of 1958–61, with increasing emphasis on self-determination.⁷ From 1961 onwards the British government had an additional reason for supporting the objective of a reunified Germany. Britain needed German support for its aim of joining what is now the European Union. The British position found its clearest expression in a speech by the Foreign Secretary in October 1972 during President Heinemann's state visit:

Cooperation to which we have grown accustomed, has shown its worth in two great fields of endeavour. Your country has taken the lead, as it was bound to do, in the task of seeking reconciliation with your eastern neighbours, and in particular Eastern Germany. We have, I hope, shown a proper and well merited confidence in your country's efforts to make progress in this field. If, as we desire, the Ostpolitik succeeds, the people of our continent can look forward to a happier and fuller life than they have known in this century. But we can only carry conviction with others if we can act from the conviction of unity among ourselves. Last week in Paris, Herr Scheel and I saw the dedication with which the heads of government present at the [EC] summit, notable among them the German Chancellor, were working to that end. No amount of logic will make up for a lack of political will. The summit showed that the necessary political will does exist to make a success of the enlarged Community, and to forge a united Europe. In this adventure, Germany's membership and Germany's partnership is central to success. You and I, and many in this banqueting hall, can record, and with complete satisfaction: Ger-

⁶ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 144.

⁷ Thus NATO foreign ministers concluded in May 1960 that 'the solution of the problem of Germany can only be found in reunification on the basis of self determination'. See FCO, *Selected Documents on Germany*, 429.

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many and Britain started this century in discord. We enter its last quarter in total trust.⁸

In 1973 the FCO legal advisers certified in the context of establishing diplomatic relations with the GDR that Britain did not regard Germany as having split into two sovereign states. The British political commitment to German unity was also confirmed in Parliament by Lady Tweedsmuir in February 1973.⁹ And again in the joint declaration by the Prime Minister and Chancellor Kohl, issued after their summit at Chequers in May 1984, in which Mrs Thatcher confirmed 'the conviction of successive British governments that real and permanent stability in Europe will be difficult to achieve so long as the German nation is divided against its will'.¹⁰ This summit approved a progress report on bilateral relations and appointed 'coordinators' to take things forward.

FRG Government Policy

In 1986, during his state visit to Britain, President von Weizsäcker reaffirmed the Germans' commitment to overcoming the division of their country by overcoming the division of Europe. The EU would always be more than a Common Market for the German people. The concept, associated in particular with Willy Brandt's adviser Egon Bahr, who developed it after the Wall went up in 1961, was that to have any chance of changing the reality of the status quo, first this reality had to be accepted, however unpleasant it was. Once the division of Germany was acknowledged, ways and means would be found to diminish its worst effects—the imprisonment of 17 million

⁸ Quoted from Adolf M. Birke and Hermann Wentker (eds.), *Deutschland und Rußland in der britischen Kontinentalpolitik seit 1815*, Prince Albert Studies, 11 (Munich, 1994), 150.

⁹ FCO, *Selected Documents on Germany*, 4.

¹⁰ 'The Heads of Government reaffirmed the importance of the United Kingdom's rights and responsibilities relating to Berlin and Germany as a whole. The Prime Minister reaffirmed the conviction of successive British Governments that real and permanent stability in Europe will be difficult to achieve so long as the German Nation is divided against its will.' See Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *German Unification*, p. ix.

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Germans in a neo-Stalinist state—and, in the longer term, to overcome it. Implementing this policy of ‘change through rapprochement’ required building up relationships of trust and confidence with unpleasant autocrats who, so German reasoning went, alone were capable of improving the lot of ordinary people in that part of Germany. Moreover, the FRG aimed to establish at least normal diplomatic relations with Germany’s former enemies in the east, notably with Poland. The Germans argued that they sought to achieve a European Peace Order that was stable in that force was excluded, dynamic in the sense that they sought peaceful evolutionary change in central and Eastern Europe, and provisional until the German nation had regained its unity through free self-determination. This Ostpolitik was consistent with NATO doctrine, as set out in the Harmel report of 1967,¹¹ of sustaining strong Western defences while also pursuing détente with the Soviet Union and its allies where possible. Willy Brandt, then Foreign Minister in the Grand Coalition, moved forward rapidly after his election as Chancellor in October 1969 to negotiate treaties with Poland and the Soviet Union, accepting realities such as the Oder-Neisse frontier between Poland and, *nota bene*, the GDR, and renouncing force as a means for change. Brandt also progressed swiftly in establishing contacts with the GDR, which the FRG was now willing to accept as a state but not as a foreign country. Initially, his dynamism gave rise to concerns in London, Paris, and Washington that the Germans might cut deals with the Soviet Union and the GDR that would prejudice Western interests in the German question, erode Allied rights in Berlin, and even imperil the NATO alliance, if the Soviet Union were to hold out the prospect of reunification in exchange for neutrality.

The Quadripartite Agreement (QA) and Associated Questions

The answer to this conundrum was to reach agreement with the Soviet Union on preserving QRR and defusing tension over Berlin. Soviet ambitions for a conference on European security that should confirm existing borders (including the one that divided Germany) as unalterable, meant that Moscow, too, had an interest in removing

¹¹ FCO, *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades* (London, 2009), 88.

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Berlin as a source of East–West tension. On the Western side there was also interest in arms control negotiations (Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions, MBFR) to reduce the preponderance of Soviet conventional forces threatening NATO. *Berlin in the Cold War* contains brief chapters on Berlin divided 1959–61 and Berlin reunited 1988–90.¹² The introduction to the latter skates over negotiations involving the two German states, Berlin, the three Western Allies, and the Soviet Union that lasted for nearly three years, from early 1970 until the end of 1972. The foreign ministers of the three Western Allies and the FRG considered that they needed a group, the Bonn Group, in which their views on all the issues raised by the FRG's Ostpolitik, impending negotiations with the GDR, Berlin, and Soviet ambitions for a European security conference, could be coordinated. For these negotiations, coordinated by the Bonn Group, the FCO deployed an exceptionally talented team, the members of which all later reached very senior positions in the Diplomatic Service, with the exception of Sir Christopher Audland, who became Deputy Secretary General of the European Commission. They were ably led by the ambassador in Bonn, Sir Roger Jackling, who had an acute legal mind. The negotiations produced: a Quadripartite (France, Soviet Union, UK, USA) Agreement (QA) signed on 3 September 1971; Inner-German arrangements agreed in December 1971; a Final Quadripartite Protocol bringing everything into force on 3 June 1972; and, finally, a public Quadripartite Declaration by the Four Powers on 9 November 1972, making clear that entry of the two German states into the United Nations would in no way affect QRR. Ten days later Brandt, the 'peace chancellor', won a decisive victory at elections to the Bundestag. The QA was the basis of these achievements. It secured notable improvements in the lives of West Berliners, and it kept the German question open. It fulfilled a NATO precondition for starting in 1972 negotiations with the Soviet Union on European security that produced the CSCE Final Act in Helsinki in 1975. Without it, the Bundestag would not have ratified in 1972 the treaties negotiated with Poland and the Soviet Union in 1970. The QA was, moreover, indispensable for the establishment of a *modus vivendi* between the two German states and their admission to the United Nations. On this basis the theory of promoting change through rap-

¹² FCO, *Selected Documents on Germany*, 75–8 and 97–100.

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prochement could be tested in practice without prejudicing QRR which, in international law, covered the whole of Germany within its 1937 frontiers. *Berlin in the Cold War* certainly would have benefited from a separate chapter on these negotiations, the most important and successful since the Soviet Union had walked out of the Allied Control Commission for Germany in 1948.

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher

Although the story of attempts by the British Prime Minister Thatcher to thwart unification has been recounted in many memoirs including her own, *German Unification* in particular contains fascinating and illuminating detail that will be new to many readers. The FCO's historians have received permission to publish records of Mrs Thatcher's many encounters with Bush, Gorbachev, Mitterrand, and her own officials that would in the past have been kept firmly under lock and key for at least thirty years. I was the Deputy Head of Mission at the British Embassy to the GDR in East Berlin from 1987 to 1990. As such, I had the impression that as the collapse of the GDR gathered momentum in the autumn of 1989, the Foreign Secretary and officials in London were failing to impress on the Prime Minister that a popular revolution was taking place that presented Britain, which had consistently supported unification under the right conditions for over forty years, with a historic opportunity to secure a central leading position in the new Europe that was taking shape. However, according to the French record, the Prime Minister told Mitterrand on 1 September 1989 that it would be 'intolerable if there was a single currency and Germany reunified as well'.¹³ Here then, is the nub of the problem. Although Mrs Thatcher's reservations, if not her outright opposition, to unification were indeed shared initially by Gorbachev and Mitterrand, although not by Bush, she was isolated in rejecting greater European integration, especially the proposed single currency which was Mitterrand's answer to the question of how to accommodate a larger and more powerful Germany within the European family. Her doubts about the sincerity of German commitment to NATO only added to the problem. She did have an ally

¹³ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 26n.

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in Charles Powell, who was knowledgeable about Germany. But on the related issues of German and European unity, the Prime Minister was at odds with the UK's principal allies, France, Germany, and the USA, and with most of her senior ministers and advisers. Her response to the German revolution of 1989 is an example of hubris leading to nemesis, which arrived in November 1990. The Prime Minister learned of her impending removal from office by the Conservative Party while attending the CSCE conference in Paris that ended the Cold War, one month after Germany had become one country, as foreseen in the Convention on Relations Between the Three Powers and the Federal Republic.

Central Europe in 1989

The rapid collapse of the GDR can only be understood in the context of burgeoning democracy in Poland and Hungary, and Soviet acquiescence in these developments. On 6 February Solidarity and the communist Polish United Workers Party began Round Table discussions which produced an agreement on 5 April to hold elections that would be at least partly free. Solidarity became a legitimate political party on 17 April and won an overwhelming victory at elections on 4 June, the day of the Chinese communist crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing. On 19 August President Jaruzelski invited Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a Solidarity activist, to form a government. Mazowiecki's non-communist government was approved by the Polish parliament on 12 September, two days after the Hungarian decision to allow all East Germans to travel freely to the West.

Although East Germans could not express their political preference in free and fair elections until March 1990, until 13 August 1961 they had been able to vote with their feet. The Wall was built to stop the exodus of mostly young and well-educated people that threatened the viability of the German part of the Soviet empire. It amounted to a humiliating verdict on the failings of Moscow's satraps in East Berlin. But East Germans were allowed to visit Warsaw Pact countries such as Hungary because these had unpublicized bilateral agreements (concluded in 1969 in the case of the GDR and Hungary) to prevent unauthorized travel by each other's 'citizens' to the West. By 1989, however, Hungarians could travel freely to the West. On

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11 January the Hungarian parliament proclaimed that the 1956 uprising had been a popular rebellion and voted for a multi-party system. On 11 February the Central Committee of the communist Hungarian Socialist Workers Party followed suit, and on 3 March Prime Minister Miklos Nemeth informed Gorbachev in Moscow of Hungary's intention to dismantle its section of the Iron Curtain, which no longer served any Hungarian purpose. Although Nemeth warned Gorbachev that the SED Politburo would react very negatively, the latter indicated that this was a Hungarian matter. As long as he was in charge there would be no repeat of 1956. Gorbachev seems not to have grasped the implications of this momentous decision. Hungarian army and border troops began work on 2 May, followed by a well-publicized (on West German TV) ceremony involving the Austrian and Hungarian foreign ministers on 27 June. The GDR holiday season was by now well under way, and soon the exodus via Hungary was reaching pre-Wall levels. In August the Hungarians terminated unilaterally the 1969 agreement with the GDR, a step regarded by the SED Politburo as high treason and betrayal. On 10 September 1989 the Hungarians decided to allow free travel to the West for East Germans, thus restoring the status quo ante 13 August 1961. One year later, on 12 September 1990, the unification treaty was signed.

Although Warsaw Pact ambassadors in East Berlin were conservative apparatchiks, their deputies were professional diplomats who had spent most of their careers in German-speaking countries and were, especially in the case of Poland, Hungary, and the Soviet Union, strongly in favour of the movement towards democracy in central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Polish and Hungarian interest in British experience of the State Treaty negotiations which restored Austrian independence on a basis of neutrality in 1955, and a readiness to share information on the travails of the SED Politburo with Western colleagues, suggested that an unreformed GDR, surrounded by democracies, and no longer defended by Soviet Union forces, might not survive for long. Yegor Ligachev, one of Gorbachev's sharpest conservative critics in the CPSU Politburo, did provide support for Honecker during his visit to East Berlin in mid September 1989. But he did not meet Krenz, whom the Russians were eyeing up as Honecker's successor. And the Soviet embassy once told me that Ligachev's visit had been concerned solely with 'agriculture', the only dossier for which he was formally

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responsible in the Politburo after Gorbachev had demoted this hard line opponent of glasnost and perestroika. Among the GDR's neighbours, only the Czechoslovak communist leadership still supported the old men in East Berlin. But they would be swept away by the Velvet Revolution in mid November 1989, at the very moment when demonstrators in East Germany stopped proclaiming that they were *the people* ('Wir sind das Volk') who wanted to reform the GDR, and started proclaiming that Germans in East and West were *one people* ('Wir sind ein Volk') whose ambition was early unification.

Unification. The Prelude: April to (8) November 1989

German Unification takes up the story in April when two new German ambassadors arrived in London as neighbours in Belgrave Square. Neither Joachim Mitdank nor Hermann von Richthofen expected that within a matter of months the GDR would be faced with an existential crisis. Nor did Sir Nigel Broomfield, the British ambassador in East Berlin, although his despatch of 20 April records most of the factors that were about to unleash it: the ring of democracies that might be completed by Czechoslovakia; the popular desire for unity with West Germany; the impossibility of using nationalism to hold the GDR together; economic weakness; and the tremendous desire for free travel which had been stimulated greatly by the concessions wrung out of Honecker during his visit to the FRG in 1987.¹⁴ The embassy underestimated – and would continue to underestimate until late September 1989 – the ability of an indigenous East German reform movement to put pressure on the regime. The embassy judged that the long-standing practice of deporting dissidents to West Germany combined with the efficiency and omnipresence of state security would enable the regime to retain control; a judgement that seemed to have been confirmed by the relatively muted public response to blatant fraud at local elections in early May. Sir Nigel did speculate on an 'Austrian' solution, but only in the distant future, because it seemed inconceivable that the Soviet Union would soon cease to regard the existence of the GDR in the Warsaw Pact as a strategic necessity.

¹⁴ Ibid. no. 2.

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A meeting in Moscow during the period 17 to 23 May of the (West) Berlin-based Political Club, a German-language think tank that focused on relations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact and the German question, brought divided Soviet counsels on Germany into sharp relief. The meeting got under way as Gorbachev's visit (15–18 May against the backdrop of pro-democracy demonstrations in Beijing about to be brutally suppressed) to China was drawing to a close. Participants who had visited the Baltic states en route to Moscow reported popular aspirations there to leave the Soviet Union and join the European Community, arguing that there were bound to be repercussions for the GDR. Not so, thundered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hardliners. Meanwhile Poles, Hungarians, and supporters of Gorbachev were indicating during coffee breaks—a month before Gorbachev's remarkable visit to West Germany—that it was time for the old men in East Berlin to catch the tide of history. I was asked privately if Britain's support for reunification was actually as solid as its public statements implied.

It was East German official support for the brutal suppression of the Chinese pro-democracy movement on Tiananmen square between 3 and 5 June, combined with Horst Teltschik's personal assessment of the GDR as 'potentially the most explosive country', that prompted Sir Patrick Wright (the FCO's most senior official) to ask the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) to look at the GDR in some detail.¹⁵ The embassy in East Berlin advised that while East Germans were profoundly dissatisfied with their lot, the situation did not seem as potentially explosive as it did to Teltschik. The embassy was also preoccupied with preparations for a visit, planned for early July, by the Foreign Secretary. The difficult question was what Sir Geoffrey (now Lord) Howe should say about the February 1945 bombing of Dresden, a city which his GDR hosts wanted to include in the programme. In the event, this visit was cancelled when Sir Geoffrey was sacked by the Prime Minister on 24 June. *German Unification* includes no documents on the situation in East Germany in July and August. As the exodus via Hungary gathered pace, Honecker was taken ill on 8 July at the Warsaw Pact summit in Bucharest, which revoked the Brezhnev doctrine. He would not reappear in public until the eve of

¹⁵ Ibid. no. 4. The results of the JIC's labours have not been released for publication.

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the fortieth anniversary celebrations in early October. The GDR was leaderless in its hour of crisis. The tipping point in this crisis was the Hungarian decision on 10 September to allow free travel to the West by all East Germans, thus propelling the German question on to the international agenda. Sir Christopher Mallaby reported that Teltschik was 'still peddling the line that the GDR was in a highly precarious state and that explosions were possible at any time'.¹⁶ My judgement that 'if both ideology and the economy began to crumble, reunification might become unavoidable' provoked consternation in London, where officials were already wrestling with the Prime Minister's opposition to such a development.¹⁷

In taking stock after the GDR's fortieth anniversary celebrations, attended by Gorbachev on 6–7 October, but before the fall of Honecker on 18 October, Sir Nigel Broomfield judged that a 'watershed had been reached. We should look urgently at the broader and longer term implications of the German question, and try to identify a solution between the present situation and reunification'.¹⁸ This advice was based on developments in East Germany at the time. Massive demonstrations in Leipzig and other cities culminated in about one million people on the Alexanderplatz in East Berlin on 4 November calling for reform of the GDR, which should become a German Sweden.¹⁹ There was intense antipathy towards the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) including towards its new leader, Egon Krenz, who had praised the Tiananmen square massacre in June. Moreover, during October the SED had attempted to stem the exodus by banning visa-free travel to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and people were gripped by something approaching panic that they were again about to be imprisoned. The most unwise decision of all, however, had been to insist that trains carrying would-be emigrants released from the West German embassy in Prague should transit East German territory. Sealed trains evoke the most dreadful memories in central Europe. The promise to rescind these travel restrictions on 4 November was too little too late – another example of the SED's inability to keep pace with, let alone get out in front of, events.

¹⁶ Ibid. no. 9.

¹⁷ Ibid. no. 10.

¹⁸ Ibid. nos. 17 and 18.

¹⁹ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *Berlin in the Cold War*, no. 396.

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The sacking of the Foreign Secretary, and the resignation on 26 October of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, were precipitated by the two men's disagreement with the Prime Minister over Britain's approach to a European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). Both favoured UK membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism, something to which the Prime Minister and her personal economic adviser Alan Walters were bitterly opposed. The Chancellor's resignation forced the Prime Minister to move John Major from the FCO (where he had succeeded Sir Geoffrey Howe) back to the Treasury. Her leadership and judgement were thus being severely tested on two issues—German unification and European integration—in both of which Germany, led by Chancellor Kohl, would play a decisive role. Contrary to the advice of officials such as Sir John Fretwell (FCO Political Director) to 'put the German question at the centre of the British policy agenda',²⁰ the Prime Minister argued in a conversation with Sir Christopher Mallaby on 1 November that Britain, France, and the Soviet Union would remain opposed to German reunification and that it was 'Germany's role in Western Europe rather than central Europe which should be the more pressing concern'. British diplomacy should focus on enlisting the Germans' support against the proposed Social Charter, bringing home to them the dangers inherent in Delors' plans for EMU, pressing discreetly for a revaluation of the German mark, and urging the Germans to reduce governmental aid and other subsidies.²¹

The day after Sir Christopher's talk with the Prime Minister, I met Vladimir Grinin, Counsellor and number three at the Soviet Embassy, to take stock after Krenz's first visit to Moscow as SED leader. Grinin argued that 'the movement to reunification could gather unstoppable momentum before sufficient trust between NATO and members of the Warsaw Pact had been developed to make this an acceptable development'.²² However, so long as Gorbachev remained in charge, the Soviet Union would not prevent it. Grinin displayed no confidence in Krenz's ability to slow down what would indeed become 'unstoppable momentum' after the fall of the Wall, one week later. Just before Schabowski, the SED Politburo member responsible

²⁰ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 23.

²¹ Ibid. no. 29.

²² Ibid. no. 31.

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for Berlin, made his fateful announcement about free travel at an early evening press conference on 9 November, Sir Christopher advised the new Foreign Secretary Douglas (now Lord) Hurd, to make a public statement of the British position on the German question during his visit to Bonn scheduled for 15 November, including not only as its main point the right of the German people to self-determination, but also 'willingness to accept reunification if that is the way things go'.²³

Unification: The End Game Begins

The documents selected for the period from the fall of the Wall on 9 November until Chancellor Kohl announced his ten-point plan on 28 November convey vividly not only revolutionary events that none of those witnessing them had expected to occur in their lifetime, but also the difficulty of devising policy to keep pace with them.²⁴ Their significance in terms of answering the German question was captured best by Willy Brandt, Governing Mayor of West Berlin in 1961, who said that 'what belonged together can now grow together'. Soviet policy was, as Sir Rodric Braithwaite, British ambassador in Moscow, put it, 'being overrun by events, out of date, incoherent and shot through with potentially dangerous inherent contradictions'.²⁵ But it seemed to strike a chord in No. 10 Downing Street. The British Prime Minister told the Soviet ambassador that she had 'clearly understood Mr Gorbachev's insistence during their talks in Moscow [on 23 September] that, while the countries of Eastern Europe could choose their own course in their domestic affairs, the borders of the Warsaw Pact must remain intact'. However, according to the Russian record made by Gorbachev's adviser Chernayev, it was the Prime Minister who said that:

Britain and Western Europe are not interested in the unification of Germany. The words written in the NATO commu-

²³ Ibid. no. 35.

²⁴ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *Berlin in the Cold War*, nos. 401-14; eid. (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 40.

²⁵ Ibid.

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niqué may sound different, but disregard them. We do not want the reunification of Germany. It would lead to changes in the post-war borders and we cannot allow that because such a development would undermine the stability of the entire international situation, and could lead to threats to our security.²⁶

These observations, and the Prime Minister's argument that the first priority was to establish genuine democracy in East Germany, suggest that the Russians were right to believe they would have an ally in keeping 'reunification off the agenda'. Sir Michael Burton, Minister and Deputy Commandant in the British Military Government (BMG), and Igor Maxymichev (Deputy Head of the Soviet embassy in East Berlin) agreed on this point over lunch on 14 November.²⁷

Reporting of calls for reunification from East Berlin was sparse until the embassy was invited by the FCO on 24 November, when the Prime Minister was meeting President Bush in Camp David, to break silence by assessing reports in the British press that demonstrators were losing patience with intellectuals intent on reforming the GDR, and were calling increasingly for unification.²⁸ Meanwhile, the Prime Minister was reported as saying during her visit to the USA that the borders of the Warsaw Pact were 'inviolable', a proposition that went down badly in Germany, where the dominant slogan at the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig and elsewhere since 20 November had been 'Germany—united Fatherland'. Nor do these volumes record an important Soviet démarche on 21 November. Nikolai Portugalov, an expert on Germany in the CPSU Central Committee International Relations Department who had often been used by the Soviet leadership to drop hints that the division of Germany might not be immutable, told Teltschik at the Chancellery in Bonn that in the medium term the Soviet Union 'could give the go ahead to a German confederation, whatever form it took'. In his memoirs Teltschik records being 'galvanized' by this démarche.²⁹ It suggested that Gorbachev had lost all confidence in the ability of first Krenz and

²⁶ Ibid. no. 26n.

²⁷ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *Berlin in the Cold War*, no. 410.

²⁸ Eid. (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 56.

²⁹ Horst Teltschick, *329 Tage: Innenansichten der Einigung* (Berlin, 1991), 44.

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now Hans Modrow, who had taken over as Prime Minister on 18 November (while EC heads of government met in Paris), to hold the GDR together as a going concern. Modrow was, in fact, already talking to the West Germans about a new treaty relationship between the two states and making increasingly desperate appeals for economic assistance. Things had indeed moved on since the Foreign Secretary had been reassured in Bonn on 15 November that the Germans, too, wanted to keep reunification off the agenda. On that day in London the Prime Minister had summed up discussion in cabinet: 'although Western governments had taken a formal position since 1955 in favour of East German self-determination, German reunification should not be treated as an immediate issue. Governments should take due account of the implications of the present turn of events for President Gorbachev.' She added, for good measure, that 'a single European currency was no answer to these wider changes'.³⁰

The FCO historians have selected one document which sets out more accurately and succinctly than any other the position in mid November.³¹ Jonathan Powell, a member of the FCO's Policy Planning Staff and the brother of Charles Powell, reported on a conference focused on the German question that he had attended in West Berlin from 15–17 November. The people of the GDR all 'demanded unification in their hearts'. The key factor would be the economy. Nobody believed that 'the Russians were seriously concerned by the prospect of confederation. Falin and others had indicated that reunification was acceptable. The four powers should do nothing until the Germans had decided what they wanted to do. The answer to the German question was one state, one people, one capital (Berlin). The general view seemed to be that this could come about very fast.' A Four Power Conference excluding the Germans—something to which both the Prime Minister and the Russians were attracted—should be avoided 'like the plague'. Powell added that 'unless the Russians speak up we will be unable to convince the Germans that it is they who are stopping reunification. Gorbachev could well render our plodding policy academic with a headline catching initiative at Valletta [where he was due to meet Bush in early December].'³² As it

³⁰ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 49.

³¹ *Ibid.* no. 56.

³² *Ibid.*

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turned out, the Americans moved first. On 29 November Secretary of State James Baker issued a statement on four principles that should 'guide the *unification* process'. The Americans had dropped 'reunification' to avoid suggestions that the new united German state would be a reincarnation of its aggressive nationalist predecessors.³³

Officials, such as Jonathan Powell, who sought to persuade the Prime Minister to base British policy on the unstoppable momentum towards unification, as opposed to attempts to delay it, had support from William (now Lord) Waldegrave, Minister of State responsible for European affairs. Not only did Waldegrave bring great intellectual capacity to bear on these issues; he also provided continuity, as the post of Foreign Secretary passed in rapid succession from Geoffrey Howe to John Major and then Douglas Hurd. He minuted on papers for the Prime Minister submitted by the new Political Director on 8 January that he was 'not against sensible tactics in relation to No. 10, but if ever there was a time when the Office should present the stark truth about what is likely to happen, and should avoid feeding illusions, that time is surely now. Most important of all, in view of what I believe to be the unstoppable desire for full reunification in the GDR, an attempt to delay it like this will make the GDR ungovernable.'³⁴ Waldegrave was also to be proved right on a question to which the Germans themselves had not so far found an answer. It would indeed be possible to secure Soviet agreement to a unified Germany remaining in NATO. The Foreign Secretary's minutes to the Prime Minister, both before and after his visit to East Berlin and the GDR from 22–24 January, confirm that he agreed with his Minister of State about unification.³⁵ Moreover, he told the Prime Minister on 26 January that he was not in favour of using transitional arrangements as a means of slowing down unification, a proposition which she had put forward in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* on 25 January. This put Britain in 'the position of the ineffective break, the worst of all worlds'.³⁶

The French, meanwhile, in the Foreign Secretary's words, were playing a 'very canny game', always careful to avoid surfacing their

³³ Ibid. no. 76.

³⁴ Ibid. no. 87.

³⁵ Ibid. nos. 99 and 106. No. 107 contains a detailed report.

³⁶ Ibid. no. 108.

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reservations about unification in public.³⁷ It is described astutely by Charles Powell in his record of the Prime Minister's meeting with President Mitterrand at the European Council Meeting in Strasbourg on 8 December. Mitterrand echoed, and even reinforced all the Prime Minister's strictures about the Germans in general and Kohl in particular. But he was careful to add that 'in practice there was not much Gorbachev could do. He could hardly move his divisions forward. We did not have many cards. The USA did not have the will. All that could be done was to have a four power meeting. German unification would happen. We were on the threshold of momentous events.'³⁸ Mitterrand insisted at a further meeting with the Prime Minister on 20 January that 'France would recognise and respect the reality of the desire of the Germans for unity. It would be stupid to say no to reunification.'³⁹ The Prime Minister disagreed. Britain and France did at least have the means to slow things down, if only they were prepared to use them. On the evidence of these two meetings, the French were not so prepared.

In his valedictory despatch on 6 December Sir Nigel Broomfield concluded that 'the question of German unity is now actual. It could become operational at any time over this winter if there is a breakdown in law and order or an economic collapse.'⁴⁰ Chancellor Kohl evidently agreed. There is no separate record in either book of his visit to Dresden (brought forward to 19 December to precede Mitterrand's visit to East Berlin and the GDR on 20–21 December), but by his own account this was the moment when Kohl decided that 'the regime was finished and unification was coming'.⁴¹ I recall his speech in front of the ruins of the Frauenkirche, destroyed by Allied bombing in February 1945, as a skilful piece of oratory that calmed people down by promising them that their aspiration for unity would be fulfilled, provided that they displayed discipline and patience. On the return flight, informal planning for German Economic and Monetary Union (GEMU) began.

Sir Nigel added in his valedictory despatch that the movement to unification was a German process over which even close allies had

³⁷ Ibid. no. 45.

³⁸ Ibid. no. 71.

³⁹ Ibid. no. 103.

⁴⁰ Ibid. no. 66.

⁴¹ Helmut Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1982–1990* (Munich, 2005), 1020.

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little influence. But a framework was needed for settling external aspects. The Poles were now alarmed by the unwillingness of Kohl (who had interrupted a visit to Poland when the Wall fell) to enter into a new treaty commitment recognizing their western frontier. Kohl argued that both existing German states had already concluded treaties with Poland recognizing the Oder-Neisse frontier. A new treaty could only be concluded after unification by a democratically elected government. Kohl also had party political calculations in mind. He expected to have to contend both with an SPD-dominated East Germany on his left flank, and calls from the right-wing Republikaner for Germany to be unified within its 1937 frontiers including Silesia, Pomerania, and East Prussia at the Bundestag elections scheduled for late 1990. The solution would be to re-establish the forum of the four powers with rights and responsibilities for Berlin and Germany as a whole, together with the two German states. The Germans were initially most reluctant to agree to a forum which for them had unfortunate echoes of the 1959 Geneva conference when their representatives had been consigned to a separate 'children's table' (*Katzentisch*).⁴² Indeed, this forum got off to a bad start with a meeting, which had been requested by the Russians, of the ambassadors of the Four Powers (without the Germans),⁴³ who allowed themselves to be photographed outside the old Allied Kommandatura building located in West Berlin. The Germans were thus not entirely reassured by their allies' assurances that their purpose at this meeting would be to discuss with the Russians Berlin Air Services (only British, French, and US aircraft could serve West Berlin), a subject that did require attention in view of the common German travel area to be established on 1 January 1990.⁴⁴ The precursor to the common travel area was the ceremonial reopening of the Brandenburg Gate, the quintessential symbol of Germany's division, on 22 December and boisterous celebrations there on New Year's Eve.⁴⁵ These events reminded me of President von Weizsäcker's aphorism that so long as the Brandenburg Gate remained closed, the German question would remain open.

⁴² Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *Berlin in the Cold War*, p. 77.

⁴³ Eid. (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 73.

⁴⁴ Eid. (eds.), *Berlin in the Cold War*, p. 109.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* nos. 419-23.

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Unification Achieved

In late January and the first half of February, events took a decisive turn. On 28 January Modrow announced that GDR elections which had been scheduled for 6 May would be brought forward to 18 March. On 30 January Gorbachev announced at a press conference with Modrow in Moscow that he recognized reunification would take place. The FCO learned on 2 February that the West Germans had already prepared a draft unification treaty.⁴⁶ On 5 February the Federal Government decided, much to the initial consternation of the governor of the Bundesbank, to announce immediate plans for GEMU without waiting for the GDR elections on 18 March.⁴⁷ Patrick Eyers, the new British ambassador in East Berlin, commented that this move could stave off 'collapse into chaos' but that 'the west Germans would run the country'.⁴⁸ On 13 February, at a meeting in Ottawa convened originally to discuss 'Open Skies', an agreement was reached to establish a forum including the Four Powers and the two German states, to handle the external aspects of unification.⁴⁹

The Prime Minister had chosen not to sum up at a meeting of the full cabinet on 1 February. The Foreign Secretary's conclusions that 'the United Kingdom was well placed to set the broad policy framework for the months ahead: the United Kingdom had supported the principle of self determination for Germany for many years', were formally correct.⁵⁰ Britain was a full member of NATO, the EC, one of the Four Powers, and a CSCE participant. But they left out of the account the damage that had already been done both to Britain's international reputation, especially in Germany, and to its ability to influence events, by the Prime Minister's hostility to unification, which was well and truly out in the open after her interview with the *Wall Street Journal* published on 26 January 1990. In it, she had stated that 'if German Unification went too fast, it could have the disastrous effect of toppling Gorbachev. It would in any case disrupt the

⁴⁶ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 120.

⁴⁷ Ibid. no. 123.

⁴⁸ Ibid. no. 132.

⁴⁹ Ibid. no. 145.

⁵⁰ Ibid. no. 114.

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economic balance within the EC where Germany already dominates.⁵¹

The documents selected for the last eight months preceding Germany's unification on 3 October illustrate admirably two strands in the British contribution. It was British officials, including the FCO's legal advisers working in close harmony with their German counterparts, who devised practical solutions to innumerable problems in winding up QRR, such as the role and status of foreign, including Soviet, forces, that were both technically complex and politically sensitive. The Americans were behind the curve, preoccupied mainly with avoiding a treaty that would have to be submitted to the Senate for ratification.⁵² There was outstanding, even visionary, work on future European security. It was the British diplomat Brian Crowe, leader of the British delegation at the preparatory negotiations, who invented the title of the concluding document of the CSCE summit in Paris which brought the Cold War to a close: 'The Charter of Paris for a New Europe.' But this work was carried out against a backdrop of continuing ructions over German and European unity that culminated in the sacking of Nicholas Ridley from the cabinet on 14 July (two weeks after GEMU), for expressing views on German and European unity widely believed to represent the Prime Minister's own.⁵³ Ridley described European Monetary Union as a 'German racket designed to take over the whole of Europe' in an interview with the *Spectator* that was illustrated with a cartoon depicting Ridley adding a Hitler moustache to a poster of Chancellor Kohl.⁵⁴ At the same time, publication in the *Independent on Sunday* and *Der Spiegel* of Charles Powell's record of the Prime Minister's seminar with historians, held on 24 March at Chequers to prepare for her summit meeting with Kohl and the annual British-German Königswinter conference in Cambridge at the end of the month, reinforced these perceptions. It was clear from this record, reprinted with associated correspondence in the appendix to *German Unification*, that it was the Prime Minister, not the historians or her Private

⁵¹ Elizabeth Pond, *Beyond the Wall: Germany's Road to Unification* (Washington, 1993), 157.

⁵² Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 174.

⁵³ *Ibid.* no. 217.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Ridley's interview with the *Spectator* was published on 14 July 1990, p. 9.

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Secretary, who thought that the Germans' 'abiding characteristics' included 'angst, aggressiveness, assertiveness, bullying, egotism, inferiority complex and sentimentality'. Charles Powell concluded that the 'weight of evidence and the argument favoured those who were optimistic about life with a united Germany'. The optimists evidently included all those present at the seminar, except the Prime Minister herself.

The atmosphere for the summit was soured by a public spat over Poland's western border. On 26 March Sir Christopher Mallaby was summoned by Teltschik who reported Kohl's 'shock and amazement' that the Prime Minister should have told *Der Spiegel* that she had heard him say at the European Council in Strasbourg on 8 December that he 'did not recognise the current frontiers', and that previous assurances on this subject had been 'overturned by the German courts'.⁵⁵ Kohl arrived in Britain a couple of days later, buoyed up by the victory of the CDU-dominated Alliance for Germany in the GDR elections on 18 March, and peeved by the Prime Minister's latest interview.⁵⁶ The stage was set for a remarkable gala dinner at the Königswinter conference. Prime Minister and Chancellor were seated, rather like Thai royalty, on one side of an elevated table, overlooking conference participants, and separated by Sir Oliver Wright, a previous ambassador to the FRG. In his after-dinner speech Kohl, who seemed to me to be enjoying himself, paid tribute to those who had made the present transformation of Europe possible, including Winston Churchill, Michael Gorbachev, and those who had sustained the Königswinter forum for forty years. The Prime Minister congratulated Kohl on his election victory, and acknowledged that Germany's aspiration for unity would soon be realized. However, she displayed no enthusiasm for it at a separate meeting with representatives of the new political forces in East Germany who had been invited to the conference. In her speech, she recalled British support for Germany over the years since the end of the war. But her main themes were the issue (still to be resolved) of a united Germany's place in NATO and the future role of the CSCE. The Prime Minister gave a preview of the ideas that she had encouraged officials to develop for the forthcoming summit. There should be new provi-

⁵⁵ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 181.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* no. 176.

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sions on the importance of democratic elections, the rule of law, human rights, the market economy, arms control, and machinery for crisis management and political consultations. The provisions of the Helsinki Final Act (1975) that borders could be changed, but only peacefully and by agreement, should be reconfirmed. All of these would find their way into the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Hermann von Richthofen recalls that the two leaders did eventually manage to clear the air with some humorous recollections of a joint visit to military manoeuvres on the Lüneburg Heath, and that at the summit meeting 'all the bad feeling had dissipated'.⁵⁷

The West Germans had been unwilling to include East German officials in discussions of either internal or external aspects of unification until the GDR had held democratic elections. Now there could be rapid progress on both tracks. Their objective was to achieve unification before the CSCE summit in late November and all-German elections to the Bundestag in early December. While Ridley and the Chequers seminar were grabbing headlines in Britain and Germany, Kohl and Genscher were meeting Gorbachev and Shevardnadze in the Caucasus, where they secured Soviet agreement to a united Germany remaining in NATO. Moreover, in the final settlement QRR would be lifted, obviating the need for a treaty to end formally the Second World War. In the Foreign Secretary's view, this brought about 'a sea change in the negotiations and put us firmly in the end game'.⁵⁸ On 23 August the Volkskammer voted for unity on 3 October via Article 23 of the FRG's Basic Law which provided that it 'would apply in other parts of Germany after their accession'. The whole process was wound up in Moscow on 12 September, albeit not without the last-minute dramas that accompany epoch-making negotiations. These included the inevitable media incident to sustain German suspicion of the British as spoilers. It was not a case now of Germans ignoring Russian sensitivities: they were, according to a poorly written article in the *Guardian* on 7 September,

⁵⁷ See German Embassy London Press release of 24 Feb. 2009, 'An Ambassador in the Annus Mirabilis of German Reunification', published at <http://www.london.diplo.de/Vertretung/london/en/02/Kanzlei_und_Residenz/An_Embassy_in_Belgrave_Square/Annus_Mirabilis_Reunification_Seite.html>, accessed 8 Sept. 2009.

⁵⁸ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigge (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 219.

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'getting too close to Moscow'. Sir John Weston provides a description of this incident and others in the final hours of this marathon that is graphic, erudite, and entertaining, concluding with a quotation from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, published in 1944: 'you are not the same people who left that station or who will arrive at any terminus.'⁵⁹

Comment and Analysis

On 19 January 1989 Erich Honecker stated that 'the Wall will remain in fifty and also in 100 years, if the reasons for its existence have not been removed'. He had in mind, above all, that it had been built to preserve the GDR as a communist state in the Warsaw Pact. In 1993 the former Soviet diplomat and expert on Germany Valentin Falin testified on oath at the trial of former GDR Defence Minister Heinz Kessler, who stood accused of command responsibility for deaths at the inner German border. On 9 November 1989 the GDR leadership had consulted the Soviet ambassador about their plans to 'end the present border regime'. Only when Ambassador Kochemasov had received written instructions from Moscow that this was an 'internal GDR matter', was the way clear for Schabowski to make his fateful announcement. Falin, who had been responsible for Germany in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) from 1959 to 1971, had been called as a witness, because it was Kessler's contention that the Wall had been built at Soviet behest. East German border guards had been obeying Soviet orders in shooting people. Falin's further testimony indicated that Khrushchev had not been greatly concerned by mass emigration and economic collapse. He had been preoccupied with military matters and West Berlin, which he perceived as an espionage centre and 'cheap atom bomb' in the heart of the socialist camp. The MFA had warned Khrushchev against trying to expel the Western Allies and turn West Berlin into a 'free city', because that could have meant war. Nonetheless Ulbricht, Khrushchev, and other Warsaw Pact leaders agreed that something had to be done. Although Falin testified that planning for the Wall bore all the hallmarks of work by the Soviet General Staff, he could not resist a sly dig at the Soviet Union's

⁵⁹ Ibid. no. 238.

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erstwhile ally. The GDR border regime had been an example of the 'German tendency to perfection'.⁶⁰

Several conclusions can be drawn from Falin's testimony. First, the Russians were convinced that the Western Allies were genuinely committed to their role as 'Protecting Powers' in Berlin. Their military and civil presence had real credibility, providing a sound basis for the 1970-2 negotiations. Second, a European security conference could only take place if the Soviet Union was prepared to make some further concessions on Berlin and links between the two German states. Third, by November 1989 the Soviet Union had higher priorities than preservation of the communist system in central and Eastern Europe, although it would take another couple of months until Gorbachev was prepared to acknowledge publicly that without the communist system and the Wall, German unification was unavoidable. Fourth, the situation had changed dramatically since June 1987, when President Reagan had received a dusty answer to his call on Gorbachev, in a speech in front of the Brandenburg Gate, to 'tear down the Wall'.

The SED leadership for its part was aware, right from the beginning in the late 1940s, that without a rigid communist structure and Soviet insistence on the continuing division of Germany, the GDR had no future. Therefore it never allowed even a glimmer of the political and social reforms that took place in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, or indeed in the Soviet Union itself. A publication in 1988 by the Berlin-based All-German Research Centre for Economic and Social Questions entitled 'Glasnost and Perestroika also in the GDR?' deals essentially with economic matters.⁶¹ Meanwhile, Romanian-style nationalism and ostensibly independent foreign policy of the type purveyed by Ceausescu were out of the question. The SED leadership were also acutely aware of the dangers inherent in West German promotion of change through rapprochement, but their ever increasing economic dependence on West Germany limited the scope for strict demarcation (*Abgrenzung*), according to the precepts of the 1974 constitution, which had defined the GDR ideo-

⁶⁰ All quotations from Falin are taken from *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 July 1993, no. 174, p. 4.

⁶¹ Forschungsstelle für gesamtdeutsche wirtschaftliche und soziale Fragen (ed.), *Glasnost und Perestrojka auch in der DDR* (Berlin, 1988).

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logically as a 'socialist state of workers and farmers'. West Germans were, in fact, extremely reticent about supporting political and social change, not only in the GDR but also in countries such as Poland. They tended to put the emphasis in the CSCE process on dialogue at the state level, and between think tanks and academic institutions which were, of course, under state supervision in the case of Warsaw Pact countries. In this way they could pursue two important objectives. First, they could avoid giving communist leaders pretexts for accusing them of being ugly German revisionists, gradually removing their sense of insecurity. Second, the network of contacts developed by institutions such as the Berlin Political Club, combined with increasing economic and trade links, enabled the Germans to spot early possible changes in the Soviet position on the German question. By the late 1980s the Germans were very well informed indeed about Hungary and Poland. The prosperous, peaceful, democratic FRG had become a pole of magnetic attraction for people in central and Eastern Europe, especially for Germans imprisoned in the GDR. The fears of post-communist leaders such as Mazowiecki about Kohl's position on Poland's western border suggest that this was, for Germans, the right approach. A country such as Britain could be much bolder in promoting peaceful evolutionary political change in the Warsaw Pact, a policy which had been pursued assiduously by Margaret Thatcher and Sir Geoffrey Howe after Gorbachev's accession to power.

SED leaders were also vain, arrogant, over confident in the security of their position, and dismissive of glasnost and perestroika. Had not Marx been a German? Honecker personally craved the prestige of visits to major Western powers, to the FRG above all. The Soviet Union had frustrated his plans for a visit in 1984 at a time of tension between East and West. But after Gorbachev had switched the lights to green, Honecker was received in September 1987 with every conceivable honour and respect, by captains of industry, politics, and culture alike. It was not a 'state' visit because Honecker was received on an even higher level than protocol prescribed for leaders of foreign countries. But the one major concession that the West Germans extracted from him was to prove the catalyst that accelerated the GDR's demise: the agreement to greatly expanded opportunities for people below pensionable age to visit West Germany on family business. A veritable industry sprang up as people discovered an urgent

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desire to attend the birthdays of distant relatives. Those without relatives or obliged to stay behind were resentful. Honecker's notion that capitalist and socialist Germans were like fire and water was wrong. There were hardly any socialist Germans who could be described as true believers. The preface (p. ix) to *German Unification* refers to a paper on the implications of this visit prepared by the FCO's Policy Planning Staff after Honecker's visit. It seemed that something was afoot in Germany. Soviet rule would end one day, probably by the middle of the next century, and 'perhaps much sooner'.⁶² The authors came in for some criticism for having gone beyond the planners' usual remit, which was to look five, or at the most ten years ahead. In fact their prediction was reasonable at the time. Gorbachev aimed to reform the Soviet system, preserve, even strengthen the Soviet Union, and secure the loyalty and support freely given of the Soviet Union's allies in the Warsaw Pact. He thought that history might answer the German question in a hundred years.

The major public failure of British policy occurred in November 1989. After the fall of the Wall had placed unification firmly on the international agenda the Prime Minister summed up discussion in cabinet in that 'although Western governments had taken a formal position since 1955 in favour of East German self-determination, German reunification should not be treated as an immediate issue'.⁶³ Until mid November public British policy, based on strong support for self-determination, was in tune both with what Germans in East and West said they wanted, and with the approach of Britain's American and French allies, although there should have been greater emphasis on Britain's long-standing support for unification under the right conditions.

Agreement in December 1973 between the FRG and Czechoslovakia to treat the 1938 Munich agreement as non-existent removed the last major obstacle to normalization of relations between the FRG and Germany's former enemies in central and Eastern Europe.⁶⁴ The

⁶² Foreign and Commonwealth Office Archives 1987 RS021/3/5/87, 'Planning Paper: The German Question and Europe'.

⁶³ Salmon, Hamilton, and Twigg (eds.), *German Unification*, no. 49.

⁶⁴ Treaty on Mutual Relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic signed in Prague on 11 Dec. 1973

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way was clear for signature of the Helsinki Final Act (HFA) on 1 August 1975. The Soviet Union failed to secure its objective of a substitute peace treaty that would confirm frontiers in Europe as unalterable. The first of the HFA's ten Principles says that participating states 'consider that their frontiers can be changed, in accordance with international law, by peaceful means, and by agreement'.⁶⁵ Much ink has been spilled over the years on the contribution made by the human rights provisions (the third 'basket') of the HFA to the peaceful revolutions of 1989. But in terms of German unification its first principle was vital. The Soviet leadership were aware of this at the time, but conceded the point on the grounds that they would never agree to frontier change. The Prime Minister was carefully briefed on the implications of HFA for German unification

Six reasons for this British policy failure can be identified. First, the Prime Minister had been impelled by her fear, suspicion, and ignorance of the Germans, combined with animosity towards Kohl and Genscher, to make a personal, decisive break with policy on the German question that Britain and its NATO allies had sustained for forty years in all international fora, unsupported by any advice from experts such as her personal foreign affairs adviser, Sir Percy Cradock. Moreover, she communicated her views to Gorbachev on 23 September, and sought to attribute them to him. The Prime Minister's lack of subtlety and guile served her, and Britain, badly on this occasion. Second, there was a tendency in London to pay insufficient attention to statements such as that by Professor Otto Reinhold, President of the GDR Academy of Sciences, who had said in September 1989 that a capitalist GDR would have no reason for existing alongside a capitalist FRG.⁶⁶ Third, the Prime Minister misread Mitterrand and Gorbachev, believing that they would be at least

<http://untreaty.un.org/unts/1_60000/26/15/00050707.pdf>, accessed 10 Sept. 2009. According to Article 1 the parties 'consider the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938 as null with regard to their mutual relations in terms of this treaty'.

⁶⁵ 'Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States', reprinted in *Selected Documents Relating to Problems of Security and Cooperation in Europe 1954-77*, Cmnd 6932 (London: HMSO, 1977), 228.

⁶⁶ Reinhold gave an interview to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 14 Sept. 1989. He said: 'what right to exist would a capitalist GDR have alongside a capitalist Federal Republic? None of course'.

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effective brakes on the process. Fourth, the Prime Minister, unlike Britain's allies, thought in traditional terms of the European balance of power. If Germany was becoming more powerful, Britain would have to balance it by drawing closer to France and the Soviet Union. Fifth, she believed that the rapid rush to unification could destabilize Gorbachev who might be replaced by a hard-liner in the mould of Yegor Ligachev (who tried to bolster Honecker in September 1989), bringing the whole process of liberalization in central and Eastern Europe to a halt. This was indeed her best argument. But it is surprising that she did not pay more attention to the Americans, who were confident that the Soviet Union would in the end permit a united Germany to remain in NATO. Sixth, and most important of all in terms of subsequent developments, the Prime Minister failed, like many of Britain's political leaders from Messina to Maastricht, to understand the dynamics of European integration and place Britain at the centre of it, a failure compounded by belief that Britain could continue to 'punch above its weight'. The link which Germans made between uniting Europe, overcoming its division, and thus overcoming the division of Germany, was widely regarded in Britain as a woolly theoretical concept, not the basis for sound practical policy. Mitterrand, on the other hand, had decided to turn this concept to France's and Europe's advantage by forcing the pace on EMU.

In 1972 Britain led by Prime Minister Heath and the FRG led by Chancellor Brandt were united in their approach to Berlin, the wider German question, European integration, and East-West relations – the total trust to which the Foreign Secretary referred during the state visit of President Heinemann in late October of that year. This trust was reflected in warm German appreciation of the British negotiating team lead by Ambassador Jackling. Shortly after the successful conclusion of the Berlin negotiations Britain acceded to the European Communities. Britain, France, Germany, and the USA had combined their efforts, judging correctly what could be achieved in negotiations with the Soviet Union, with impressive results. The position in 1989 was very different. The Prime Minister did not trust the Germans. She misread the French and the Russians. She was disappointed by the Americans. She tried to hold up European integration, the external issue that would precipitate her downfall. The lesson must surely be that successful British policy in Europe should be based not on adversarial politics and the balance of power, but on trust and

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partnership with other members of the EU, including, of course, Germany.

In writing this review article, COLIN MUNRO has drawn on his personal experience as Deputy Head of Mission in East Berlin from 1987 to 1990; Private Secretary to the late Lord Blaker, Minister of State dealing with East-West relations from 1979 to 1980; Desk Officer for the Federal Republic of Germany in the FCO's Western European Department (WED) from 1983 to 1984; Deputy Head of WED from 1985 to 1987; and Consul General in Frankfurt from 1990 to 1993. Since then he has been working on these issues from the wider perspective of European security. His final post in the Diplomatic Service was as Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) from 2003 to 2007.