Book I

THE ORIGINS

On October 3, 1990, tens of thousands of Germans had gathered in front of the Reichstag in Berlin to celebrate the final step in the official unification of Germany. Less than a year earlier, on November 9, 1989, the world had watched with amazement as the Berlin Wall—*the* symbol of Germany and Europe's partition—crumbled when East German border guards, confused over their precise orders, had opened the border to allow a gathered crowd of East Germans to cross over to West Berlin. What started out as a trickle soon became a torrent as joyous Germans began to tear down the hated wall that had divided their country, and no one stopped them. It was the beginning of the end of the division of Germany. Ten months later Germany was unified—and in NATO.

I was among those standing in front of the Reichstag, a young American academic who had returned to Berlin to witness this event for both personal and intellectual reasons. My grandmother had lived in Berlin in the 1930s. I had been a Research Fellow at the Free University in West Berlin while writing my doctoral dissertation on the division of Germany. During the course of my research, I had visited East Berlin many times. My first job out of graduate school had been as a cub research analyst on East Germany at Radio Free Europe before joining RAND. The German Democratic Republic, as East Germany was officially known, was one of the most repressive regimes in the Soviet bloc. Now, it along

with the Soviet bloc was disappearing! Rarely has someone witnessed the vanishing of one of his academic research topics with a greater sense of satisfaction.

But it was not only the division of Germany that was passing from the scene. A mindset and way of thinking about European security was being shattered as well. During the post–World War II period, the belief that security in Europe was built on the partition of Germany and the continent had increasingly become conventional wisdom in the West. While both Washington and Moscow claimed that they wanted to overcome Europe's divide, the reality was that many people had not only become comfortable with but even saw virtue in a divided continent. In a widely read book in the late 1970s called *Europe Between the Superpowers: the Enduring Balance*, for example, A. W. DePorte wrote that the division of Europe had created a security system that was quite stable and stood independently of its Cold War origins.[1] One of our best known diplomatic historians, John Lewis Gaddis, had titled his study of the Cold War, *The Long Peace*, reflecting the widespread view that the Cold War, while certainly unsatisfactory in many ways, had nevertheless created a degree of stability in a part of the world where two world wars had originated.[2]

NATO had originally been created to deter a Soviet military threat posed by Stalin and to provide a security umbrella under which Western Europe could rebuild and integrate. It had brought peace and stability to Europe's western half, but left the continent's eastern half in the Soviet orbit. The Alliance's founding fathers had held out the hope that one day the Soviet Union would mellow and release its grip on the eastern half of the continent and allow Europe to again come together. But as the Cold War division of Europe deepened in the 1950s and 1960s, the existence of two opposing military alliances—NATO and the Warsaw Pact—increasingly seemed to reinforce the continent's division as opposed to fostering the overcoming of that divide.

In Central and Eastern Europe that system was known as Yalta—a metaphor for an unjust division of Europe that had left the eastern half of the continent under Soviet domination. While different in their origins and nature, NATO and the Warsaw Pact were increasingly seen as confirming Europe's division into hostile military camps. The rise of détente in the 1970s in Europe was in many ways an effort to ameliorate the impact of that division. While governments in West and East continued to support their alliance affiliations, unofficial voices started to bubble up, questioning whether western policy was effective and arguing that these two military alliances were part of the problem and had to be abolished if Europe's divide was to be overcome. On both the left and the right, *Ostpolitik* was accompanied by calls for a drawdown or even withdrawal of U.S. and Soviet troops and the loosening of alliance ties in order to help knit Europe back together.

I was part of a generation of Western academics raised with the conventional wisdom that a divided Germany and continent was a more or less permanent feature of Europe's geopolitical landscape. When I opted to write my doctoral

dissertation on overcoming the division of Germany in the mid-1980s, several colleagues suggested that I consider a less esoteric and more topical issue. No one imagined that by the time I had completed my thesis that division would be no more. Conventional wisdom not only underestimated Moscow's willingness to let go of its satellites. It also misjudged the strong desire among the people of what was then still called Eastern Europe to liberate themselves and become part of the West. It was a lesson I would remember in the years ahead as the NATO enlargement debate raged and cautious diplomats argued that fulfilling Central and East European aspirations to join the Alliance was simply not politically or strategically feasible.

The fall of the Berlin Wall also raised the question of NATO's future. For decades academics had debated what would happen to the Atlantic Alliance if and when Moscow mellowed—to use the original phrase from George Kennan—and relaxed the Soviet grip on Central and Eastern Europe. Would Washington choose to remain in Europe or declare victory and go home, too? Did our European allies want us to stay or go? If NATO was supposed to survive, what would be its purpose in a Europe where the Soviet threat had disappeared? In the fall of 1990 what had previously seemed like a very theoretical consideration was becoming a very real policy challenge. Communism in Central and Eastern Europe was collapsing in front of Western eyes—and would soon collapse in the USSR as well. A priority of the new noncommunist governments in the region was the withdrawal of Soviet troops. The Warsaw Pact's days were numbered. The question of what would happen to NATO was not far behind.

1. AN AMBIGUOUS PLEDGE

October 3, 1990 had provided part of an answer. Germany was officially reunified—as a member of NATO. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl had decided to push for German unification shortly after the Berlin Wall fell—and to do so in NATO and with an ongoing U.S. military presence on German soil. The West German constitution allowed East Germany to accede to the Federal Republic, and thereby become part of the network of alliance commitments that West Germany already enjoyed. Getting Moscow to agree to German unification in NATO was among the greatest foreign policy accomplishments of President George Bush and his national security team. Many had deemed its mission impossible when the Wall first came down. But the Bush Administration had pulled off a diplomatic coup by convincing Soviet President Gorbachev that Europe and Russia, would be better off with a unified Germany in NATO rather than outside of it.[3]

It was also the first step in overcoming Europe's divide—and in retooling NATO for the post–Cold War era. Faced with the prospect of NATO disappearing and the U.S. disengaging, the instinct of nearly every government in Europe

was to opt to maintain the Alliance in some new form, if only as an insurance policy. German unification in NATO was the first post–Cold War enlargement of the Alliance and an early sign that NATO's role in Europe was growing, not shrinking. To what degree German unification was thought of as a precursor of NATO's subsequent enlargement to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary is less clear—and remains a bone of contention even today. Moscow would subsequently claim that it had received assurances from the United States, France, and the United Kingdom that NATO enlargement would go no further than eastern Germany. Former senior officials of the Bush Administration have denied that charge, and at least some have suggested that it was at least implicitly the first step in a broader opening of the Alliance to the East.[4]

The dispute centers on a discussion that took place in Moscow between Soviet President Gorbachev and U.S. Secretary of State James Baker on February 9, 1990. The Berlin Wall had fallen exactly three months earlier. The issue on the table was Germany's future. It had become increasingly clear that events on the ground were moving faster than anticipated and that the train to a unified Germany was leaving the station. Many of Germany's neighbors, including some of its closest European allies, had deep reservations about the prospect of a unified Germany. President George Bush and the United States had decided to support German aspirations but hoped to secure a unified Germany in NATO. Baker's mission to Moscow was to convince Gorbachev that Moscow was better off with a unified Germany in NATO than an independent, neutral Germany outside of it.

Following an opening introductory summary by Gorbachev on the Soviet domestic scene, Baker went right to the issue of Germany's foreign policy future. "The unification process is moving much faster than anyone anticipated last December," he told the Soviet President. The internal aspects of unification were for the Germans to decide, he emphasized. But Germany's future foreign policy alignment was an issue where the views of the country's neighbors had to be considered. As two of the victorious powers over Germany in World War II, the USSR and the U.S. had a legal voice in determining the country's foreign policy orientation.

"I want you to know one thing for certain," Baker continued. "The President and I have made clear that we seek no unilateral advantage in this process." The U.S. was not proposing to keep a unified Germany in NATO to gain a strategic edge over Moscow, but rather to ensure European stability, an interest the two countries shared. The U.S. favored a unified Germany in NATO, Baker underscored, because it was not sure that a neutral Germany would remain nonmilitaristic. Germany's NATO membership was also the mechanism to ensure an ongoing American military presence in Europe. "All our allies and East Europeans we have spoken to have told us that they want us to maintain a presence in Europe," Baker told the Soviet leader. "I am not sure whether you favor

that or not. But let me say that if our allies want us to go, we will be gone in a minute."

Gorbachev seemed open to Baker's logic. But he delivered a long, somewhat rambling account of how many different views and voices one could find among the Germans themselves over how unification should take place. "We understand the need for assurances to the countries to the East," Baker continued. "If we maintain a presence in a Germany that is a part of NATO, there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the East. At the end of the day, if it is acceptable to everyone, we could have discussion in a two plus four context that might achieve this kind of outcome. Maybe there is a better way to deal with the external consequences of German unification. And if there is I am not aware of it."

After Gorbachev responded, Baker broke in to ask the key question: "Let's assume for the moment that unification is going to take place. Assuming that, would you prefer a united Germany outside of NATO that is independent and has no U.S. forces or would you prefer a united Germany with ties to NATO and assurances that there would be no extension of NATO's current jurisdiction eastward?" Gorbachev responded that he was "giving thought to all of these options" and that the Soviet political leadership was going to be holding a seminar on the issue shortly and went on to say: "Certainly any extension of the zone of NATO is unacceptable." Baker responded: "I agree."

But to what? Was Gorbachev referring to the extension of NATO to eastern Germany or further eastward to other Central and East European countries? And what exactly was Baker agreeing to? Just to extend NATO to eastern Germany? Or was he saying that NATO would never enlarge further eastward? The issue was left hanging. Gorbachev went on to say that he favored the presence of U.S. troops and that he did not want to see a replay of Versailles when it came to Germany's future. He concluded by saying: "What you have said to me about your approach and your preference is very realistic. So let's think about that. But don't ask me to give you a bottom line right now."[5]

Gorbachev eventually acquiesced to German unification in NATO, albeit with special provisions limiting the deployment of non-German NATO forces on the soil of what had been East Germany. The issue of NATO's further eastward enlargement was never again raised. While Washington and Moscow would spend months and many hours of negotiations going over the details of a settlement for a unified Germany, neither Gorbachev nor Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze again raised the issue or sought further assurances to limit NATO's future enlargements. In the summer of 1990, NATO revised its military strategy and publicly stated that it no longer considered the Soviet Union a threat, changes that made it easier for Moscow to argue back home that German unification in NATO was part of the transformation of the Alliance and that it was no longer the Cold War foe it had once been. The Bush

Administration received credit for a truly historic diplomatic accomplishment. In the West, Soviet leader Gorbachev was hailed as a far-sighted statesman. At home, his conservative critics accused him of selling out and suggested that Moscow could and should have gotten a much better deal.[6]

In the mid-1990s, Russian leaders would resurrect the Baker-Gorbachev conversation of February 9, 1990 and claim that they had received a U.S. pledge to not enlarge NATO to Central and Eastern Europe. Washington would, in turn, reject this charge and insist that this conversation was limited to the future of Germany, not Central and Eastern Europe. U.S. diplomats noted that Gorbachev and Shevardnadze never returned to this issue in the numerous subsequent conversations both sides had on German unification, and that Moscow had subsequently recognized the right of all countries in Europe to choose their own alliance affiliations in the Charter of Paris. Moreover, American diplomats insisted, the U.S. and the USSR were discussing Germany's future in their unique roles as victorious powers over a defeated Nazi Germany in World War II. They were exercising those residual legal rights and obligations to help determine the foreign policy and security orientation of a unified Germany. There were no similar rights for Central or Eastern Europe.[7]

Such nuanced diplomatic points aside, the reality was that no one in either Washington or Moscow was thinking about further NATO expansion in the spring and fall of 1990. Indeed, the issue had not yet been raised by the Central and East Europeans. These countries would not embrace that goal for another two years. Better than anyone, they understood at the time that Germany's unification in NATO was not the first step of a Western strategy to bring them into the Alliance. Germany's security was one thing; Central and Eastern Europe's was another. Krzysztof Skubiszewski, Poland's Foreign Minster at the time, subsequently wrote:

> The position of the Alliance at the time was clear: from its perspective, the admission of new members was absolutely out of the question. Although the unification of Germany resulted in a territorial expansion of the Alliance, it did not simultaneously, involve an increase in the number of members. In reality, the various guarantees extended by the West to the USSR in relation to the settlement of the German problem eliminated, under the circumstances, the option of admitting new members. The German issue aside, the Alliance reacted with prudence to the changes in Central Europe. The USSR's consent to the envelopment by the Alliance of the whole (that is, unified) Germany drew the limit to the Soviet concessions and the West fully approved of that state of affairs. Thus the solution adopted in the case of Germany made the openness of the Alliance somewhat illusory. On the other hand, it could not have been ruled out that at some point the United States would acknowledge its interest in the enlargement, while Germany—America's most important partner in

Europe—having remained within the Alliance, would not want to be forever its eastern outpost; in other words that it would support Poland's membership. However, that was a matter of further developments, which at the onset of the 1990s did not yet appear.[8]

2. DISMANTLING YALTA

If it had been up to NATO alone, enlargement might very well have stopped at the eastern German border—not because of any secret understanding with Moscow, but simply because there was no impetus in the West to expand the Alliance's borders further eastward. The fact that Moscow had agreed to German unification in NATO was considered a near miracle by all. No one wanted to push the envelope any further. Instead, Western policy focused on shoring up the Soviet leader, as the best way to ensure that the USSR would stay on a pro-Western reformist track—especially as it became clear that he was engaged in his own power struggle at home.

Instead, the push for NATO to move further East would come from Central and East European leaders themselves. Once they were confident they had regained their national independence and dismantled the structures of Soviet domination, they would start to look for ways to integrate with the West. And as they worked their way though the options, they soon settled on the goal of becoming NATO members and increasingly came to see it as the natural culmination of their desire to be fully integrated and secure in the West. To reach that goal, they would have to persevere in overcoming the hesitance and objections of nearly every Alliance member's capital in Western Europe and North America.

But those aspirations to join NATO, which became so strong in the region in the mid and late 1990s, were not immediately apparent in the initial wake of communism's collapse in the fall of 1989. Joining NATO had not been a demand during previous anti-Soviet rebellions in Hungary in 1956, the Prague Spring in 1968, or part of Solidarity's platform in Poland in 1981. Nor was the issue of joining NATO widely discussed in the underground literature of the opposition movements in these countries in the 1980s. It was simply beyond the scope of imagination even for anti-communist dissidents.

It also reflected a bitter lesson drawn from the failure of anti-Soviet uprisings in 1956 and 1968—namely that Western support for overcoming Europe's divide was largely rhetorical and that the West, too, had become increasingly comfortable with the status quo in a divided Europe. Opposition strategists in Central and Eastern Europe, having concluded that they could not rely on the West for their liberation, now embraced the notion of trying to roll back communism from below. Following the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, groups like Charter 77 emerged in Czechoslovakia committed to building civil society outside of the control of the communist authorities. Polish intellectual dissidents also con-

cluded that the overall strategic balance had cemented Europe's division and Poland's subjugation. It was the origins of what would eventually become Solidarity's main strategy—avoid directly threatening the official trappings of Soviet domination or communist rule in Poland and instead hollow out communist rule from within. Implicit in this strategy was the assumption that foreign policy issues would not be questioned lest they gave the communist authorities or Moscow a pretext to intervene.[9]

By the early 1980s the lack of any real prospect in overcoming the division of Europe and the apparent willingness of many in the West to acquiesce in this state of affairs was nevertheless leading to growing frustration in the region. As Milan Kundera wrote in a widely read essay, the tragedy of Central Europe was that it had been forgotten and "vanished from the map of the West." [10] Renewed East-West tension in the wake of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the election of President Ronald Reagan, and the deployment of Euromissiles all had their echo in the region. Against this backdrop Ronald Reagan and his hard-line policies were extraordinarily popular in parts of Central and Eastern Europe—precisely because they were seen as challenging the status quo. Solidarity leaders saw a parallel between their strategy to roll back communism from below in Poland and Reagan's efforts to roll back Soviet power on the global scene. A common joke at the time was that Reagan was probably more popular in Warsaw than in any other European capital—with the exception of Thatcherite London. As Adam Michnik pointed out, Polish workers had no sympathy for Republican domestic polices. But they were pleased that Reagan was trying to change the rules of the game on Central Europe.[11]

Other Central and East European dissidents, however, were sympathetic to the anti-Yalta undertones of the peace movement and its call for the abolition of *both* alliances as a best way for their nations to regain their independence. In his book *Antipolitics*, the Hungarian writer Gyorgy Konrad blamed both superpowers for acquiescing in the existing status quo and division of the continent. The status quo in Central Europe, he argued, represented "the petrification of an exceptional state of postwar occupation." NATO and the presence of U.S. military forces in Western Europe only served to legitimate the Yalta system as much as Soviet forces and the Warsaw Pact, he claimed. His book called on Europeans in both halves of the continent to detach themselves from their respective superpowers and ask them to withdraw their troops to help create a unified Europe.[12]

These Central and East European dissidents, certainly not naïve about Soviet intentions, rejected the view that both superpowers were somehow moral equivalents. They pointed out to Western peaceniks that true peace was required both within societies between rulers and the ruled, as well as peace between states, something that existed in West European democracies but did not exist in their societies. As Vaclav Havel wrote, it felt a bit surreal to pontificate

about the future of alliances and European security architecture when one was more worried about being arrested by the secret police.[13]

But they nevertheless had some sympathy for Western peace activists precisely because they were among the few circles in the West reaching out and talking about a strategy to overcome Yalta. In 1985 a group of Czechoslovak dissidents from Charter 77 issued a document called the Prague Appeal, which called on the peace movements to recognize that peace must exist not only between states but also between the state and its citizens. It said that German unification would be an important step in overcoming the continent's division—the first statement of its kind in Central Europe. But it also called for the dissolution of both the Warsaw Pact and NATO and the withdrawal of Soviet and American forces to help create a unified Europe.[14]

These debates over how best to dismantle Yalta were overtaken by the sudden collapse of communism in the fall of 1989. It took nearly everyone by surprise, including the political opposition in many of these countries. During the summer of 1988, Polish and Czech dissidents had met conspiratorially in the Tatra mountains on the Polish-Czech border near the town of Rychlebske Hory. They spent much of their time worried they would be arrested at any moment. The following summer Adam Michnik showed up in Prague as an elected member of parliament, brimming with confidence that the winds of change were blowing. He told his Czechoslovak friends that within the year they, too, would be free. No one on the Czech side believed him. But within a matter of months Hungary was opening its border to the West, the Berlin Wall was coming down, and the Velvet Revolution was taking place. By the end of the year, Vaclav Havel had gone from dissident playwright to President of Czechoslovakia.[15]

Initially, the new democratic elites of Central and Eastern Europe focused on securing democratic governance and dismantling the vestiges of communist and Soviet control. National independence was their top priority—and that meant first and foremost negotiating the withdrawal of Soviet troops from their soil and dismantling the formal structures of the Soviet imperial system: the Warsaw Pact and the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). Within a matter of months, Czechoslovakia and Hungary had reached agreements with Moscow on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from their soil by the end of 1991. Poland moved more slowly, both because it was relying on Moscow's support for a final settlement on its western border with a unified Germany, and because it would serve as the transit route for the withdrawal of the bulk of the Red Army from Germany as well.[16]

But Soviet troop withdrawals were only the first step. The next step was dismantling the Warsaw Pact itself. In May 1990, Jozsef Antall was elected the Prime Minister of Hungary. Antall was a schoolteacher but had been banned from teaching after his role, as a young man, in the 1956 anti-Soviet uprising. He became the curator of a small museum on the history of medicine that served as a haven for

members of the political opposition. He now emerged as the leader of the Hungarian Democratic Forum and was elected Prime Minster committed to withdrawing Hungary as soon as possible from the Warsaw Pact. At the time, Moscow was still hoping to somehow preserve the Pact on a new basis, plans for which were to be discussed at a Warsaw Pact summit in Moscow in early June 1990. Antall, with Havel's support, managed to get Gorbachev at the last second to agree to simply review the future of the Pact without prejudice to the final outcome.

The new language decided nothing, but gave the Central Europeans political cover to subsequently push for more radical change. When, during the summer and fall months, Soviet draft proposals for a reform of the Warsaw Pact started to circulate, former dissidents now turned diplomats in the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary stepped up their consultations—often relying on contacts and friendships forged in the political underground—to come up with a common front on the need to dissolve, not reform, the Pact. They formed the Visegrad group, named after the city in Hungary where they established their cooperation. In November Lech Walesa replaced Jaruzelski as President of Poland, putting former dissidents at the helms of all three countries. In January 1991, Visegrad Foreign Ministers gathered in Budapest to publicly announce their desire to dissolve the Warsaw Pact. When the Visegrad heads of state met in early February, they were publicly joined by Romania and Bulgaria. Moscow was now confronted with a unanimous view among its former allies.

Recognizing the handwriting on the wall, Gorbachev agreed to dissolve the integrated military structure of the Pact while still hoping to preserve it as a political entity. This step was taken in Budapest in late February 1991. Central and East European participants reported that several of the Soviet generals actually had tears in their eyes during the session. The Soviet delegation did not attend the press conference and at one point suggested that the proceedings not be published.[17] But Moscow had not yet fully given up on keeping these countries in their orbit. Soviet Foreign Minister Bessmertnykh told his colleagues that while Moscow had agreed to dissolve the Pact, it would not tolerate these countries joining either the European Community (EC) or NATO. Between December 1990 and March 1991, the Soviets tabled drafts of new bilateral treaties with these countries that contained clauses not to join new alliances, embark on military or intelligence cooperation, or allow the deployment of foreign troops or transit rights by third parties.[18] They refused, with the exception of Romania.

On July 1, Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel presided over the final dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in Prague. Soviet Vice President Gennady Yanayev called for NATO to follow and dissolve itself as well. But the final communiqué issued by the Pact instead simply called for a "transition to all-European structures." The Central and East Europeans refused to say anything that implied that NATO should follow suit. At a news conference, Havel noted the symbolism of signing the Pact's death warrant in Czechoslovakia: "Prague, once the

victim of the Warsaw Pact, has become the city where the Warsaw Pact is meeting its end as an instrument of the Cold War." In the words of Jozsef Antall: "A bad marriage has ended, now friendship can begin."[19] Yalta was dead. The question now was, what would replace it?

3. ALIGNING WITH THE WEST

Having dismantled the pillars of past Soviet rule, these countries now turned to the goal of locking in and consolidating their newly won freedom and independence. Rejoining the West had been an important *leitmotif* of the revolutions of 1989. The institutions these countries initially turned to in order to achieve that goal were not NATO, but the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (EU).[20] The OSCE was the one institution to which these countries already belonged. It also had a strong moral standing in Central and Eastern Europe given the role the Helsinki Final Act had played in defending human rights and inspiring opposition to communism. And it espoused the vision of a pan-European peace order uniting both halves of Europe that these countries were looking for.

In the spring of 1990, Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier proposed the creation of an OSCE-based "European Security Commission" that would eventually replace NATO and the Warsaw Pact.[21] Speaking at the Council of Europe that May, Havel himself echoed the same message, noting that while NATO had a better chance than the Warsaw Pact to become the core of a new European security order, it, too, needed to change everything from its doctrine to its name.[22] In justifying his proposal in an article, Dienstbier argued that simply switching membership in the Warsaw Pact for membership in NATO would be the wrong approach. "Replacing previous membership in the Soviet sphere of influence with integration into another sphere of influence would hardly improve the security situation of Central Europe."[23]

Such proposals clearly went too far for many in the West, as well as in Central and Eastern Europe. Western governments, including the United States, viewed the OSCE as a complement to NATO, not an institution that would supplant it.[24] But they, too, were looking to the OSCE as a lead institution for addressing the security problems in the eastern half of the continent and for putting the two halves of Europe back together. The OSCE summit in Paris in November 1990 not only issued the "Charter of Paris," reflecting a vision of a new, democratic and undivided Europe, but also took a number of steps to institutionalize the OSCE as a forum for political dialogue between the two halves of Europe.[25] But it quickly proved unrealistic to expect an institution armed with little more than moral suasion and few resources or capabilities at its disposal to provide security to the eastern half of the continent or to carry the burden of overcoming Europe's Cold War divide.

If the OSCE was too weak, the EU was too slow. The initial hopes of many Central and East Europeans in the early 1990s that the EU would rapidly open its political and economic doors to embrace them were quickly dashed. In early 1990 the EU negotiated new "Europe Agreements," which provided limited market access as well as political consultations for these countries, but carefully avoided any hard commitments to membership.[26] There were differences within the EU on whether the priority should be "deepening" integration in Western Europe or "broadening" to embrace Central and Eastern Europe. The forces in favor of deepening were led by France, where President François Mitterrand spoke of a process to integrate these countries into the EU that could take "decades."[27] While Brussels was also promising to reinvigorate the Western European Union (WEU) as a potential European-only defense arm, the Central and East Europeans soon concluded that relying on the EU as the primary framework for Western integration and to address their security needs was not going to work.

There were two other problems with the EU. One was its failure in Bosnia where the EU had stumbled in trying to play a lead role in stemming the conflict after war broke out in the spring and summer of 1991. The other problem with the EU was that it did not involve the Americans. The Central and East Europeans trusted the United States. They were among the most pro-American countries in Europe in spite of—or perhaps because of—decades of communism. They did not necessarily trust the major European powers with which they had their own mixed histories. Their goal was to get the Russians out and the Americans in.

That was not what the EU had on offer. Indeed, not all West Europeans even shared that goal. When senior French diplomats came to Paris in the spring of 1991 to prepare a joint conference between Presidents Havel and Mitterrand, the divergence in their thinking became apparent. As one senior Czechoslovak official put it: "I soon realized that the French wanted the Americans out and the Russians in—and we wanted it the other way around." In his speech at the conference, Havel noted in Mitterrand's presence that it was crucial that the link between North America and Europe remain in the future.[28]

That left NATO. It had been demonized for decades by communist propaganda as the citadel of American imperialism and aggression. Almost none of the new democratic elites knew much about it or had ever stepped foot in NATO headquarters. It was mysterious if not forbidden fruit. The Central and East Europeans nevertheless gravitated toward it for a mix of reasons. In some cases, it was fear of Russia reasserting its influence. For others it was as much about involving the Americans in Central Europe to balance other European powers, and in particular, a unified Germany.[29] Above all, it was about having a security anchor to help consolidate a pro-Western democratic orientation in what historically had been a rough geopolitical neighborhood. It reflected a de-

sire to be part of the one institution that had the military muscle to provide real security in a pinch.

I was exposed to Central and East European thinking on these issues as part of a team of RAND experts invited to assist these countries in the early 1990s. Along with the National Defense University (NDU), RAND was among the first western think tanks on the ground in the region helping these new democratic governments establish civilian control over the military and develop new national security strategies. In June 1990, RAND co-hosted the first of several workshops in the region, starting with the Polish Ministry of Defense in Warsaw—the first of its kind. Soviet troops were still in Poland but the new Solidarity-led government had started to reach out to the U.S. The conference took place in the hall where the Warsaw Pact had been established. Sitting in chairs once occupied by the likes of former Soviet communist party head Leonid Brezhnev, and where Soviet marshals had deliberated on Warsaw Pact plans to invade Western Europe, one could not help but feel a sense of history.

The American delegation included the then Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Forces in Europe, Air Force General James McCarthy, and Army Lieutenant General John Shalikashvilli, who would go on to become NATO's Supreme Allied Commander—Europe (SACEUR) and, subsequently, President Clinton's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was the first time McCarthy had been east of the Iron Curtain, while it was the Polish-born Shalikashvilli's first trip back to Poland since his childhood. The Polish delegation contained an uneasy mix of former Solidarity activists and old guard Soviet-trained generals. But the new tone in Polish foreign policy was soon apparent. We sat there in amazement as former Solidarity dissidents-turned-diplomats explained how they had always shared the goals and values the West had fought for in the Cold War—and asked whether it might be possible to join the institution created to defend them: NATO.

During a panel discussion I chaired, a Polish general stood up to ask whether it was possible for U.S. forces to be stationed on Polish soil to help provide them with security. I looked at General Shalikashvilli who was sitting next to me on the panel. Neither of us knew what to say. In the car on the way back to the hotel a number of the American participants got into a heated argument over the issue of possible Polish membership in NATO. The debate among the Americans continued at the bar. It was the first time I met several individuals—Eric Edelman and Dan Fried—who would become close colleagues when I joined the State Department seven years later. That evening we stayed up late with our new Polish friends drinking vodka and trying to explain a RAND briefing on how the U.S. might help secure Central Europe's newly won freedom by defending Poland.[30]

As the final negotiations on the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact were moving forward in the spring of 1991, these countries stepped up their official efforts to

reach out to NATO. Initially they sought only closer ties with the Alliance, not membership. That was what the Alliance had to offer and was all they dared to hope for. Already in June 1990 the Alliance had established liaison relationships with the former members of the Warsaw Pact. But given the insecurity they felt, the leap from wanting to have closer ties with NATO to actually becoming a member of the Alliance was not huge. Initially, it was the Hungarians under Prime Minister Jozsef Antall who were in the lead in articulating their desire to develop the closest possible relationship with NATO. But the Czechs were not far behind. In late 1990 and early 1991, a number of President Havel's close advisors—Michael Zantovsky, Alexandr Vondra, and Karel Schwarzenberg—began to argue in favor of abandoning Dienstbier's OSCE-based scheme and embracing NATO instead.

In February 1991, Vondra, Havel's chief foreign policy advisor at the time, told a visiting Political Committee delegation from NATO that the OSCE was not going to be enough and that Prague was looking for a security guarantee. He argued that the deteriorating situation in the Balkans and the Persian Gulf, as well as the rise of nationalism in the Balkans and elsewhere, were all signs of growing instability that could affect Czechoslovakia. Neutrality was not an option and it had become clear that EU membership was not in the cards either. He suggested that NATO consider some kind of special treaty or declaration with Czechoslovakia to provide that guarantee. The reaction was not enthusiastic. As Jiri Dienstbier, who was also in the meeting, recalled in his memoirs: "The guests raised the question that would make the issue of the expansion of the Atlantic Alliance so problematic for years to come: how would the Soviet Union accept any kind of special agreement between NATO and Central European countries?" Vondra responded by arguing that NATO should say that such a step was designed to promote stability and not aimed against anyone.[31]

Dienstbier made the same proposal to NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner in late February while in Brussels to prepare Havel's upcoming trip to NATO headquarters. But Woerner told him that NATO would not agree because of the likely Soviet reaction. Therefore, when Havel visited the Alliance in early March, the first head of state from a Central and East European state to do so, he was careful not to push the envelope too far. He opened his remarks to the NATO ambassadors by apologizing for the lies that his predecessors had spread about the Alliance during the Cold War and thanking the Alliance for its role in saving Europe from totalitarianism. But he also warned that Czechoslovakia and the other countries were in danger of sliding into a security vacuum that could jeopardize the new democracies of the region and that the dangers his country faced were common threats shared by all those around the table.

"We know that for many different reasons we cannot become full members of NATO at present," Havel continued. "At the same time, however, we feel that an alliance of countries united by a commitment to the ideal of freedom and

democracy should not remain permanently closed to neighboring countries which are pursuing the same goals. History has taught us that certain values are indivisible: if they are threatened in one place, they are directly or indirectly threatened everywhere." In the meantime, he concluded, "we would welcome it if a lasting system could be set up soon for cooperation and exchange of information between Czechoslovakia and NATO. We wish to intensify our dialogue on security matters."[32] The issue was now openly on the table.

Poland was paradoxically still the most cautious of the three Visegrad countries in articulating its NATO aspirations. While Solidarity had been the first democratic opposition movement to come to power in the region, it had agreed to leave the Presidency and the key ministries handling internal and external security in communist hands so as not to provoke Moscow. While such arrangements were quickly overtaken by events, they nevertheless remained intact and slowed down Poland's articulation of its desire to build closer ties with NATO. Warsaw also felt obliged to seek Moscow's support during the negotiation on German unification until it was sure that the Oder-Neisse border issue had been resolved once and for all. Poland was also a key transit route for withdrawing the Red Army from Germany as well as the sizeable number of Soviet forces on its territory. Moscow had withdrawn its troops from Hungary and Czechoslovakia by the end of 1991, but the final units of the Red Army did not leave Poland until September 1993. Although Walesa had replaced Jaruzelski as the elected President of Poland in December 1990, during the spring of 1991 the official Polish position continued to be in favor of neutrality, which Walesa and Skubiszewski both stated during the Polish President's trip to Washington, D.C. in the spring.[33] One month later he reiterated: "Poland is not putting itself forward as a candidate for NATO membership," emphasizing that Warsaw only wished to have closer contacts with the Alliance.[34]

But in the spring of 1991 the first political voice, the right-wing Center Alliance, an opposition party, called for Polish membership in NATO. That summer and fall, a group of post-Solidarity intellectuals, frustrated by what they viewed as the government's timidity on the NATO question, established the Atlantic Club to lobby more actively for Polish membership in the Alliance. In January 1992, a new center-right Polish government under Prime Minister Jan Olszewski came to power and took a clear stance in favor of full NATO membership. But in March Walesa was still flirting publicly with ideas such as NATO-II or "NATO-bis" in which the Central and East European states would organize themselves as a group of countries with a special and close relationship with, but not membership in the Alliance.

Two factors now pushed the Central and East Europeans over the threshold to push for full NATO membership. One was the war in Bosnia, which broke out in the summer of 1991 and immediately sent reverberations across the continent. In Central and Eastern Europe it served as a reminder that Europe's na-

tionalistic demons were still alive in the post-communist world. While the Balkans certainly had their own special circumstances, many Central and East European leaders looked at what Milosevic was doing and recognized it as the kind of manipulated nationalism they knew from their own histories. They knew that the danger of what the Hungarian writer Gyorgy Konrad called a new "ethnic Cold War" existed in their region as well. "Yugoslavia is a miniature central Europe," Adam Michnik wrote. "What is happening in the Balkans could be a warning shot for it could happen here. We have the same psychological makeup, only our traditions and ethnic situation are somewhat different."[35] This only reinforced the Central and East Europeans to anchor their fledgling democracies firmly in the West.

The other factor was the aborted coup by Soviet hard liners in Moscow in the summer of 1991. On August 19, 1991 Russia awoke to hear on the music of Chopin and Tchaikovsky on the airwaves, the classic harbinger of grave news in the USSR. An announcement followed that President Mikhail Gorbachev was sick and unable to perform his duties and that a special committee, called the Committee for the State of Emergency, had assumed power. At the time, Boris Yeltsin was President of the Russian Federation, one of the USSR's 15 republics, and involved in his own power struggle with the Soviet President. Yeltsin appeared in front of the Russian White House to declare the ouster unconstitutional and called for a general strike. He then proceeded to go outside and climb up on a Russian tank to show his defiance. That picture would make history. It signaled the beginning of the end of the failed coup and Yeltsin's political ascendancy as a protector of Russian democracy.[36]

The aborted coup in Moscow affected Central and East European thinking in two ways. The initial announcement of the coup had sent shivers down the spines of many in the region and reminded them of how vulnerable their newly won freedom and independence might be. Central and East European leaders had immediately consulted among themselves and requested clear signals of support from both Washington and NATO headquarters in Brussels. While many Western officials considered the language of the U.S. and NATO response strong, it only reminded the Central and East Europeans how vulnerable they were and that that they did not have any meaningful security guarantees. Having close ties with NATO in a pinch, they concluded, meant little. They decided they could not afford to run that risk again.

Equally important, the failed coup set into motion a chain of events culminating in the USSR's collapse by year's end, when Mikhail Gorbachev presided over the lowering of the hammer and sickle in the Kremlin and stepped down as Soviet President. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was a geopolitical earthquake as profound as the collapse of the Soviet empire in Central and Eastern Europe had been two years earlier. Both the outer and the inner Soviet empires were now gone. Russian military power would be withdrawn another 1,000 kilo-

meters eastward. A second band of newly independent states would now emerge between NATO and Russia. It gave these countries new geopolitical room for maneuver. As Polish Foreign Minister Skubiszewski put it: "It took the 1991 August coup in Moscow and the break-up of the Soviet Union—events that came out of the blue and had nothing to do with Poland—to open up certain chances."[37]

At a NATO summit in Rome in November 1991, the Alliance unveiled its own post–Cold War new look by issuing a new strategic concept and by launching the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) to reach out to the countries of the former Soviet bloc. But the collapse of the Soviet Union quickly outpaced these changes as well. The Alliance's new strategic concept was drawn up for a world in which the USSR still existed and in which one of NATO's primary roles was to deter a residual Soviet threat. Similarly, the NACC was premised on the assumption that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe would be content with closer institutional cooperation with NATO short of membership.

Both were soon overtaken by events. The collapse of the USSR gave the countries of Central and Eastern Europe new leeway and emboldened them to put their NATO aspirations directly on the table. Meeting in Prague on May 6, 1992, Czech President Vaclav Havel, Polish President Lech Walesa and Hungarian Prime Minister Jozsef Antall now declared that their goal was actual full-fledged membership in NATO.[38] By the end of the year that goal of full NATO membership was written into the official national security strategies of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. Their quest for NATO was now official.

By the spring of 1992, the debate over NATO enlargement was starting to bubble up in the public domain. Testifying before the Polish Senate in February 1992, former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski suggested that the question of Poland's eventual membership in NATO "now needs to be put officially on the table."[39] At a conference in Warsaw one month later, Secretary General Woerner acknowledged that while enlargement was not now on the Alliance's agenda, there was no reason why it could not be at some point in the future.[40] At the spring NATO Ministerial in June in Oslo, Deputy Secretary of State Larry Eagleburger noted that at some point NATO might have to expand, but made it clear that this issue was not part of the current agenda.[41]

In the run-up to what would become George Bush's final trip to Poland and Central and Eastern Europe as President, Administration officials debated whether or not the President should open his speech with a perspective on eventual NATO enlargement. Language was drafted for a speech the President would give in Warsaw's Castle Square on July 5, 1992.[42] But Bush's key advisors could not agree and the language was never used. Instead, the issue of whether or not to enlarge NATO to Central and Eastern Europe would be left to the next President of the United States, Bill Clinton.