

**Excerpt from the second conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and G. Bush.  
Washington, White House, May 31, 1990.**

(Present from the Soviet side: S. F. Akhromeev, A. F. Dobrynin, V. M. Falin, A. S. Chernyaev, E. A. Shevardnadze; from U.S. side—J. Baker, B. Scowcroft and other officials).

GORBACHEV: If we did not establish personal contact earlier, if our ministers had no experience of cooperation, and most importantly, if Malta [summit] did not take place, then I am convinced that our countries would not have been prepared for the events in Eastern Europe, and especially in Germany. And that means that we could have made big mistakes. Because during periods of high tension one match could spark a bonfire.

Now we can register the fact that the acute period of cardinal changes proceeded quite calmly in principle, even though the changes themselves sometimes assumed some quite sharp shapes both in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union.

In this connection, I would like to propose to you right away to focus on the picture of the changing Europe and the processes launched by the German unification as one single phenomenon. Because all this is so interconnected that you cannot separate one from another ...

I think there is [a] real [possibility] to find such a model of solution for the external aspects of German unification that would not only not undermine, but to the contrary, would strengthen positive tendencies in the Soviet-American dialog, in Europe, and in the entire world as well. A model that would include some length of time and that would be synchronized with the European processes. Then, after going through some transition period, we would arrive at some new structures of relations in Europe, including the relations in the sphere of security.

During such period it would be necessary to change quickly the nature of the opposing blocs, to transform them from military [blocs] into primarily political organizations. In our view, such positive intentionality would be solidified by some kind of agreement between the Warsaw Treaty Organization [WTO] and NATO.

Parallel to that you could come up with an initiative directed toward reform of the NATO doctrine, and the Soviet Union would bring its concrete military structures in accordance with its new defensive doctrine. We could develop exchanges between headquarters, and we could jointly discuss the levels of armed forces of the future united Germany. Simultaneously, we could raise the more general questions related to interaction of security structures of the USSR and the USA.

Finally, such a creative approach could also inspire some new options for ensuring security of the united Germany—let us say stand on two pillars—not only in the West, but also in the East. As a hypothesis I would suggest that it could be some form of associated membership.

I have to admit that the thoughts that Secretary of State shared with us in Moscow also gave a push to our creativity, which is characterized by search of mutually beneficial continuous steps. I hope that you also will not let down our hopes and would offer something new. Because if we come to an agreement, then, I am confident, the Germans will agree with us.

BUSH: Thank you for your explanations. As I understand it, we have some fundamental differences in the German issue. Possibly, the roots of it are in the different historical heritage of the USSR and the USA. Your concern, your mistrust toward the united Germany are too deep, they ignore the 50-year old democratic experience of Germany.

At the same time, one can understand your fears. We also fought Hitler, but our losses do not stand any comparison with the 27 million Soviet lives sacrificed in the armed struggle with Nazi Germany.

And yet, as it seems to me, our approach to Germany is more realistic, and has better timing. Because the processes of German unification are unfolding faster than any of us could have imagined, and there is no force that can put a brake on them. That is why the mistrust oriented toward the past is an especially bad adviser here.

It seems to me that our approach to Germany as to a close friend is more pragmatic and constructive, although, I have to tell you honestly, it is not shared by everybody in the West. Some West Europeans, just like you, do not trust either Germany or Germans as a whole. However, we all in the West are united in one [concern]: the main danger lies in separating Germany from the community of democratic states, in trying to impose some special status and humiliating conditions on her. It is precisely this kind of development of events that could lead to a revival of German militarism and revanchism—which is exactly the concern you have.

It seems to me that without forgetting about those violations of human rights that took place in Nazi Germany, we have to at the same time take into consideration her recent democratic experience, and start from the notion that Germans deserve their respected and equal place in the family of democratic nations.

Thus, to sum it up, I wanted to say that we approach Germany from different positions, although the [recent] transformations, as you pointed out correctly, are now changing the faces of both the Soviet Union and the United States, being in direct contradictions with the established stereotypes.

Of course, we do not possess a crystal ball, and we cannot predict the future, however, as far as we can see the nearest future, here the biggest evil would be to try to separate united Germany into a special category. Not only West Europeans but also most of the countries of Eastern Europe agree with us on this. At the same time, united Germany should not be anybody's enemy, and the process of inserting it into the new Europe

would stipulate deep involvement of the USSR, and a fair consideration of your country's interests.

And one more question. I think you would after all agree that some U.S. presence in Europe is necessary, even though some people even in the United States itself are inclined to a different point of view, they complain about the disproportionately big burden in defense and economic maintenance of Europe, which Americans had to take upon themselves. However, if we start from the position that prevails in our country, then the U.S. political, economic and military involvement in the life of Europe is indispensable for the security and stability of the entire Old World.

Sometimes people ask me—with tongue in cheek—so who is the U.S. enemy in the new, transformed beyond recognition Europe? And I respond with conviction—confusion, instability, unpredictability. As difficult as it could be, I want to assure you that the American presence in Europe does not threaten interests of the Soviet Union in any sense whatsoever. More than that, right now our presence there is a guarantee of stability.

Of course we are acting in the conditions of democracy, and, if the new generation of Germans decides so, we will pull out of Germany. However, today, I reiterate, the mood is completely different. These moods are strengthened by the NATO traditions, by many of the chapters of the North Atlantic Treaty. Taking into account everything I said, I am asking you again to overcome your fear of united Germany, and to leave the past behind. On this road you will find in us reliable partners, and we would be able to show together to the rest of the world that we were able to rise above the selfish interests, that we are working for the common good.

I understand that you will probably find nothing new in my words. But believe me that this is my sincere conviction, and if I am not right, then I am asking you not to hesitate to point out my mistakes to me. I will only add that I am trying not to rush to conclusions and moreover, not to make any sudden or politically extravagant steps. I remember, when the Berlin Wall fell, my political opponent accused me of cowardice, of not being sufficiently energetic in welcoming that development. However, I took into account your appeal to show caution, to act in a sensitive manner, bearing in mind the fragility of new processes in Europe and in the Soviet Union.

As far as [my response to] my critic, I said then that I did not intend to dance on the ruins of the Berlin Wall like a little boy.

Believe me, we are not pushing Germany toward unification, and it is not us, who determines the pace of this process. And of course, we have no intention, even in our thoughts, to harm the Soviet Union in any fashion. That is why we are speaking in favor of German unification in NATO without ignoring the wider context of the CSCE, taking the traditional economic ties between the two German states into consideration. Such a model, in our view, corresponds to the Soviet interests as well. Therefore, I am asking you to point to me where [do you think] I am mistaken.

GORBACHEV: First of all, I think I understood the main source of your concern. You see the U.S. presence in Europe as a factor of stability, and you are worried about the prospects of its preservation. Well, I already said that now the U.S. presence in Europe is even necessary (what will happen in the future, life will show). I am talking precisely about the military presence, because the U.S. economic and political participation in European affairs—is an uncontestable constant.

Europe is the natural center of global politics, and if we allow diversions here, then consequences will be felt throughout the entire world. Soviet-American cooperation represents one of the pillars, on which the European political space is resting. That is why we are in favor of taking your interests into account, which means—in favor of U.S. presence in Europe.

However, you are making a methodological miscalculation, when you are connecting your presence with NATO only, and when you worry that if the FRG pulls out from the North Atlantic Treaty, it would mean the beginning of its end and therefore—the beginning of the end of your military presence on the continent. I do not agree with this conclusion, but I understand your concern. Especially as far as today's reality is concerned—when one probably could not do without NATO anyway.

I also see your efforts to change NATO functions, to try to invite new members into this organization. If the course aimed at the transformation of the union, at its political diffusion into the all-European process is serious, then, naturally, it is a completely different business. But then the question arises about transforming NATO into a genuinely open organization, the door to which could not be closed to any state whatsoever. Then, probably, we could also think about becoming a member of NATO. However, today, honestly speaking, there are very few facts for such a radical conclusion.

Now about another topic. You are extremely concerned about the health of united Germany, from which you calculate the health of NATO. You are so concerned about it that you forget about the health and interests of the Soviet Union. And this, in its turn, does not help either stability or predictability at all.

Instead of fixating on the membership of the future united Germany in NATO, let us better think about how we could bring the military-political blocs, that still divide Europe, closer together. Let us say, why would one reject from the get-go FRG's membership simultaneously in NATO and in the Warsaw Pact? Such a double membership could become a binding element, some sort of a forerunner of the new European structures, and at the same time, it would anchor NATO.

In the practical sense, united Germany could make a statement that it would abide by all the obligations inherited from both the FRG and the GDR. That the Bundeswehr would still be under the orders of NATO, and the troops in the GDR—to the government of the new Germany. Simultaneously, the Soviet troops would still remain in the territory of the present GDR during the transition period, and all this could be supplemented by some kind of an agreement between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This way we would alleviate

concern of other countries and speed up the construction of the future structures of the European security system.

We don't have to accomplish everything at once. A step-by-step approach is possible. For example, we would welcome the change in the NATO doctrine already at the next meeting of this bloc.

A natural question arises: if NATO does not plan to fight with us, then with whom? Not with Germany?

BUSH: I already said –with instability.

GORBACHEV: Do you really think that the more weapons [you have] the more robust stability would be? It seems to me that the past decades should have convinced you that confrontation and arms race puts heavy burden on the shoulders of peoples.

All right, we tossed this thought there and back, as they say; now let our ministers search for concrete solutions to external aspects of the German unification. Let them search taking into account the progress in the 2+4 negotiations, making sure that they preserve our rights as based on the results of World War II. I would not recommend anybody to treat them jokingly—they will end only at the final stage of the overall settlement.

One of the spheres that might be fruitful for such searching [for solutions] could be a discussion of the content of the transition period: what do we fill it with, which kind of structures, how do you change alliances and what kind of common documents do you prepare.

In this connection I am ready to publicly sign the following commitment: if at any time during the transition period the United States has a feeling that the Soviet Union is trying to infringe on their interests, then Washington has an unquestionable right to break out of the agreement and to undertake corresponding unilateral measures.

But we will never allow that to happen. Because that would contradict our own interests.

BUSH: This is very good. I take this statement of yours into consideration. However, I would like to correct one wrong impression. I don't think at all that the more weapons there are the more stability there is. To the contrary, the United States is striving toward the fastest agreement in Vienna and to an immediate move to even deeper reduction in the framework of Vienna-2. In all this, naturally, we are ready to respect the legitimate interests of the Soviet Union.

Maybe I should not be saying it, but it seems to me that it would be incorrect to draw parallels between the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from the countries who do not need them any longer and the prospect of reducing the U.S. presence, which is welcomed by practically all Europeans and which represents a stabilizing factor.

GORBACHEV: I think we can agree on this. But one has to have a clear understanding that if the Soviet people get an impression that we are disregarded in the German question, then all the positive processes in Europe, including the negotiations in Vienna, would be in serious danger. This is not just bluffing. It is simply that the people will force us to stop and to look around. And I would really prefer not to do it. I would like to move the Soviet-American dialog ahead, and to strive for fastest achievement of agreements in Vienna and in other forums.

In this connection, it is really important that we achieve a very clear understanding here in Washington. Otherwise, everything will become more complicated, and there are no objective reasons for that.

Moreover, additional flexibility is in order, of course, if it comes from both sides. Let us say, I remember how the Secretary of State hinted to me in Moscow that he was not against going back to our old proposal—to limit the number of Soviet and American troops not at 195 thousand but by 225 thousand. Well, we can think about that.

BAKER: I would like to use the opportunity to emphasize the main thought—we are trying to take the interests of the Soviet Union into account to the fullest extent, and the nine points that I presented in Moscow speak to that effect quite clearly. Let me recount them briefly.

We agreed to support creation of pan-European structures, which we avoided earlier.

We announced adaptation of NATO to new situation by strengthening of its political component.

We are trying to move in the direction of limiting armed forces as fast as possible, including the Bundeswehr. Obviously, it would require a very close contact and trust on the part of the Germans.

We assured the Soviet Union that during a defined period there would be no NATO troops in the GDR.

We are willing to allow the Soviet troops to stay in the GDR for a short period of time. The President intends to discuss this issue with you in more detail later.

We gave new impetus to the discussion of the problem of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.

Already today we are trying to ensure a final and satisfactory for everybody solution on the [issue of the] borders.

We and the Germans reached an understanding regarding the obligations of future Germany to renounce possession of nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons.

The United States is trying to create favorable political conditions for further development of Soviet-German economic relations.

All this is clearly aimed at ensuring legitimate interests of the Soviet Union.

SHEVARDNADZE: We are prepared to work on all these issues with the Secretary of State. However, the central issue of the military-political status of future Germany requires a decision at the presidential level.

We also have to determine the content of the transition period, during which united Germany would continue to have obligations both before NATO and the Warsaw Pact. And this is not just a chimera, because parallel to that, the two blocs will be moving closer together, the military confrontation will be taken down and the basis for collective security in Europe will be established.

BUSH: NATO is the anchor of stability.

GORBACHEV: But two anchors are better. As a seaman, you should be able to understand it.

BUSH: And where will we find the second anchor?

GORBACHEV: In the East. What it would be concretely—let our Ministers think about it.

BUSH: Yes, let them think about it. But we have to take into account the exceptional pace of German unification. After the successful conclusion of the consultations in the framework of 2+4, a new Germany is right around the corner.

And at that moment we could only rely on NATO. Of course we should discuss expanding of the role of the CSCE process, but I will tell you honestly, that it is simply too ponderous to expect any fast and concrete result [from it].

GORBACHEV: We do not exclude any options. It is possible that NATO and the Warsaw Pact will continue to exist in some form during a longer period of time than we can imagine it now. Then they, as I already said, could conclude some kind of agreement, accounting for the creation of united Germany and the metamorphoses of their own organizations as well. At the same time, there would be an option of an associated [simultaneous] membership in the WTO and NATO. Because if we want to put an end to the split of the continent once and forever, then the military-political structures too should be synchronized in accordance with the unifying tendencies of the all-European process.

Today it might sound as a surprise, but we are entering an absolutely new period of European politics. Besides, World War Two had already witnessed the birth of a very

unusual coalition united by a common noble goal. Is it that we are more stupid than Stalin and Roosevelt?

BUSH: We need to learn from their mistakes too.

GORBACHEV: So let us create a new free coalition, change doctrines and institutes, establish the primacy of politics over military structures.

BAKER: How do you see the coexistence of the new NATO and the new Warsaw Pact in practical terms?

GORBACHEV: First of all—a concrete agreement between the blocs, which would give rise to multiple exchanges, creation of joint organs for strengthening trust, preventing crisis situations.

These processes would provide a good encouragement for the Vienna agreements as well, serve as political insurance for them.

However, if we do it differently, if we include powerful united Germany in one alliance, then it would immediately create an unbalanced situation, and issues would arise to which nobody would be able to find an answer.

BUSH: Do you agree with our starting thesis that we should not create a special status for united Germany?

GORBACHEV: I would agree [with it] if you accept an associated membership, the principle of blocs moving closer together with united Germany acting as a mediator of the process, i.e., a situation, which does not change the present obligations of either the FRG or the GDR, and that it would be followed naturally by the reform of the blocs themselves, in an organic linkage with the Vienna and the all-European process.

The terrible losses that we suffered in World War Two—this is also the political reality of today. And no one should be able to forget about it.

BUSH: Still, it is hard for me to understand you. Maybe it is because I do not feel threatened by the FRG, I do not see an aggressive power in this democratic state. If you don't break your psychological stereotype, it would be difficult for us to come to an agreement. And an agreement is possible, because both Kohl and we want to cooperate with you in every sphere.

GORBACHEV: There should no lack of clarity here. We do not have fear of anybody—not the U.S., not Germany. We just see the necessity of changing [our] relations, the need to break the negative and to create a constructive model. This is our free choice.

I hope nobody here believes in the nonsense that one of the sides won the victory in the Cold War. Thoughts like these just glide on the surface grasping only the tip of the

iceberg. The conclusion must be completely different: 50 years of confrontation have proven its absurdity and that it only leads to self-destruction.

Now about trust. You assert that we do not trust the Germans. But then why would we give the green light to their aspiration to unification. We could have given them the red light, we had appropriate mechanisms. However, we gave them the opportunity to make their choice by democratic means. You, on the other hand, are saying that you trust the FRG, but you are pulling her into NATO, not allowing her to determine her future on her own after the final settlement. Let her decide on her own what alliance she wants to belong to.

BUSH: I fully agree with that. But the Germans have already made their choice quite clearly.

GORBACHEV: No, you are just trying to put them under your control.

BUSH: If Germany does not want to stay in NATO, it has a right to choose a different path. This is what the Helsinki Final Act says too.

GORBACHEV: Then let us make a public statement on the results of our negotiations, [where we will say that] the U.S. President agreed that sovereign Germany would decide on its own which military-political status it would choose—membership in NATO, neutrality or something else.

BUSH: It is a right of any sovereign country to choose alliances. If the government of the FRG—I am talking purely hypothetically—would not want to stay in NATO, would even tell our troops to get out, we would accept that choice.

GORBACHEV: That's how we will formulate it then: the United States and the Soviet Union agree that united Germany, upon reaching the final settlement, taking into account the results of World War Two, would decide on its own which alliance she would be a member of.

BUSH: I would propose a somewhat different formulation: the United States is unequivocally in favor of united Germany's membership in NATO, however, if it makes a different choice, we would not contest it, we will respect it.

GORBACHEV: I agree. I accept your formulation.

BUSH: Maybe our Ministers should discuss this issue in more detail.

GORBACHEV: I am only for it, but let them discuss inclusion of this formulation in some kind of a summary document along with our ideas about the transition period.

BAKER: Whatever you say, but the simultaneous obligations of one and the same country toward the WTO and NATO smack of schizophrenia.

GORBACHEV: It is only for a financier, who puts cents together into dollars. Politics, however, is sometimes a search for possible in the sphere of unfamiliar.

BAKER: But obligations to the WTO and NATO are adversarial obligations.

GORBACHEV: Here, here, you are closer now. You started to talk about rivalry, and that would lead to confrontation. It means nothing is changing. Therefore, by pulling united Germany into one bloc you would be breaking the balance radically. And then we will have to decide what to do in that new situation—whether to continue to sit in Vienna, and so on.

Let us after all reject the logic of confrontation and search for a constructive outcome.

FALIN: I would like to clarify one moment. We are talking about replacing temporary structures, even though they did exist almost 50 year, with permanent [structures], in which the Soviet Union and the U.S. could unite for the entire foreseeable future. You said yourself that in the future the FRG could raise the issue of withdrawing from NATO. That is why it would be good for us to think about the future too, to make calculations about the future security structure. Here only a pan-European system, into which united Germany would be integrated on equal conditions with everybody else, can give us guarantees.

If we are united by our understanding of our common ultimate goal, then we can agree on the transition period. The main thing is to reject military confrontation, to come to an understanding that security in Europe is indivisible. In this sense unification of Germany should become the end of the division of Europe, and not [the event] that solidified [the division of Europe] for the future.

BUSH: So what should we do about the public statement?

SHEVARDNADZE: I would not do it in a rush, I would proceed cautiously, taking into account the fragility of the current progress both in the 2+4 framework, and in terms of preparations for the pan-European summit, and in terms of the Vienna agreements.

BUSH: And still, what are we going to say if we are asked about the results of this discussion?

GORBACHEV: We will respond that we devoted this entire plenary session to the consideration of the situation in Europe, including the settlement of the external aspects of German unification. On the basis of this exchange of opinions we agreed that the foreign ministers and experts would continue their work on the issues that were raised here.

And if we are asked if our positions moved closer, we could say that we had a serious and useful exchange of opinions, and that now we understand each other's approaches and

positions better. Beside that we could add that during the discussion we proposed ideas, which require additional consideration. Let them be intrigued by what kind of ideas those were.

BUSH: I agree. That's what we will do.

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