

On the occasion of the Aspen Institute Germany's 6th annual **Berlin Transatlantic Forum 2019** entitled *Fit for Purpose? The Transatlantic Relationship and the World of Tomorrow*, Robert B. Zoellick, Former President of the World Bank, Former U.S. Trade Representative and Lead U.S. Delegation at two-plus-four talks, shared with the audience personal recollections of the German unification process, lessons to be learned, and developments originating in 1989/90 that continue to shape the international stage of today. The Forum and the speech were held on November 6, 2019, in the Festsaal of Berlin City Hall. Rüdiger Lentz, Executive Director of the Aspen Institute Germany, introduced Mr. Zoellick by emphasizing his outstanding role during the two-plus-four negotiations and his tireless dedication to a united Germany and a strong and reliable transatlantic partnership.

"I am delighted to be back in Berlin, regardless the weather. It's a wonderful city and it has changed so much, not only over sort of my lifetime, over the past 30 years. I think it's an extraordinary and unique city in the world. It's a privilege to be here with many friends, many colleagues that I worked with before. I do want to have a special thanks for Rüdiger and Aspen Berlin because I think these institutions have always been critical, perhaps even more critical today.

One of the reasons why I think the German reunification story needs some recollection is because the events of 1989/90 raced past so quickly. And the world moved on without much reflection about what happened and how. So, I wanted to open our session today with a few possible lessons from the story of German reunification.

First, the importance of anticipation. Prediction is extremely hard and over the past couple of days that I have been here, people asked could you predict the fall of the wall. Of course, not the specifics. But I do think it's important for policy makers to try to see trends and prepare for them. So, recall in early 1989 President Gorbatschow had captured the world's attention. But he also in doing so, he had created some uncertainties. Was he seeking a breathing period for the Soviet Union to get stronger? Perhaps a new type of phase to undermine Western resolve? Or was it a historic opportunity? Would he be overthrown by a reactionary wing? And the critical question in early 1989 was how far would the Soviets permit Eastern Europe to break free?

*Now Gorbatschow had clearly generated excitement and hope especially here in Germany. And the US faced an immediate problem in early 1989 with Germany because, as some of you may recall, the INF - intermediate nuclear forces - Treaty of '87 had eliminated all nuclear missiles in Europe except the short-range SNF missiles. And NATO had pledged to modernize those missiles, the Soviets had already done so with much larger numbers, but this wasn't such a popular idea in Germany. As Volker Rühle said, "The shorter the missiles, the deader the Germans." So, Germans didn't want to modernize, they wanted to try to negotiate. But other allies, particularly Britain and Margaret Thatcher felt the absence of short-range missiles could lead into a de-linkage of nuclear deterrence. And so, the topic was one which was particularly controversial in early 1989. Importantly, President Bush recognized that Germany was the *Schwerpunkt*, the central point, of NATO, politics and cohesion in the new era.*

And by May, Bush proposed the bold plan to negotiate conventional forces, armies and airplanes to much lower and equal levels. He had recognized that the Cold War had begun in Central Europe and if it was going to end, it had to close there. But this prospect was more than arms control. It was the idea that if Soviet Armies started to leave Eastern Europe, that would support the process of political change. It would also help Gorbatschow because the costs of conventional forces were much larger than the nuclear forces. And critically, if you had parity of armies, the need for nuclear deterrence, so therefore the short-range nuclear missiles, would become less important. So, in the process of uniting the alliance, dealing with arms control, addressing Gorbatschow, we were also addressing the big German political problem. And in doing so, President Bush was able to establish his leadership of NATO in US initiative. Now, there is a slight difference in priorities here Ronald Reagan, who had focused on the nuclear arms agenda. Most historians, if you read the accounts to this period, have overlooked this early period in 1989. Right after the NATO Summit, President Bush visited Mainz, Chancellor Kohl's home state, and he gave a speech. And the speech was titled "Partners in Leadership". This is a signal to Germans, even though some Germans' voice hesitated at the notion of leadership, we were recognizing that a very paced set of change the US-German partnership would be more important than ever.

A little side story: Early in May, President Bush had actually introduced the notion of unification in an interview and we tried to put unification in the speech in Mainz, but Brent Scowcroft, who was a little more cautious, took it out: "We put in self-determination." A little bit later, in the course of the summer, in July, President Bush visited Poland and Hungary. He was trying to encourage the reform process in those two countries without being provocative. And recall, in aftermath all of this looks sort of inevitable but right after the May NATO Summit, we all went home, and we had Tiananmen Square in early June. So, the uncertainty of what would happen, and Gorbatschow had never actually denied the Chinese solution, the uncertainty as we went forward in 1989 was very, very high.

After Poland and Hungary, Bush goes on to Paris, which was the G7 Summit that Mitterrand was hosting, and arranged a special session to actually focus on Central and Eastern Europe, and in doing so tried to get the then European Commission to play a special role. So, we were trying to already think that if the changes took place, it would be very important to have Europe's institution be reaching out to the East.

So, just consider the advantages of anticipation. By July 89, so within six months, the US had been able to establish clear leadership of NATO, it launched a bold conventional forces proposal that pushed the short-range nuclear issue to the backside, it strengthened bonds with Germany, kept Germany very close to the alliance politics, and it signaled support for Eastern Europe, and initiated an economic mechanism to overcome the division of Europe.

So, well before the events of the late summer led to the opening of the wall in November and Bush's first summit with Gorbatschow in Malta in December, we were positioned even no-one could have predicted.

Second point: The US diplomacy of that era had both a historic and a strategic perspective: We were trying to provide a framework for us and for others to deal with the race of events that one couldn't totally predict. In the aftermath, scholars have focused very much on what they called the Russia question, what was the future of Russia after the breakup of the Soviet Union. But frankly, our focus in 89/90 was on the German question. What we meant by that was, as we know from German history from the 1600s to 1871, the German question was a series small states in the center of Europe that had been manipulated by outside powers. After 1871, the question changed. A very big state in the center of Europe without natural boundaries and how to deal with that set of challenges at the heart of Europe. And we know the story: two world wars, devastation of Europe and then, since 1947/49, the German question had been how to try to deal with West German democracy within an architecture of the European Union and the transatlantic integration and of course two German states on the front line of the battle ground of the Cold War.

So, while the US was committed to fulfilling the promise to Germans after 40 years to support unification, we needed to do so in a way that would also be reassuring to neighbors in East and West. And that's what led Secretary Baker to come here in Berlin in December shortly after the wall came down and give a speech that talked about the commitment to German unification but how it needed to take place within the process of NATO and within the change in European integration and also in a European-wide context with the CSCE. We wanted to avoid what we called a Versailles victory. What we meant by that was a peace settlement that would plant the seeds of its own destruction. This had both a German and a Russian component. We were committed to restoring Germany's full sovereignty, ending the still existing four power rights. So that there would be no discrimination that a future generation of Germans might resent. The phrase we used was "avoiding singularization". Well, for years afterwards, if I had mentioned this point, people thought this is not something to worry about, but it's interesting if you look at 30 years and you look at some of the developments in Eastern Europe or even in some of the GDR with the AfD, the danger of having left any difference with Germany where a different generation could say "Why have we been treated separately."

At the same time, we wanted to try to offer the Soviets an outcome that was attentive to their basic interest, reasonable security, economic concerns, borders, and to treat them with respect.

Third, and this is the critical story that links to the events in Berlin. We had to combine the strategy with practical sense of facts on the ground. So, the story of Berlin from 1948/49 with the Berlin airlift where, as that airlift began, there was great uncertainty about the capacity to be able to meet the needs. But what stood out to the people in the United States and the world was the tenacity and courage of Berliners. 1953 with the workers' revolt in East Berlin, 1961 with the creation of the wall and the resistance to that wall by Berliners which led to John F. Kennedy also coming to an understanding when he came in 1963 about the fact that Berlin was not a liability, Berlin was an asset in the process of the Cold War. But that depended fundamentally on the courage of the people of Berlin. If you think about it, it's an amazing set of changes. After fighting a war where Berlin as the capital of your enemy, by the course of the 1960s Berlin is

freedom city, Berlin stands for freedom in the course of the Cold War. And of course, in 1989 the Germans both East and West created a momentum for unification.

I will tell a little story about the human side of the process: When Sec. Baker came in December of 89, we saw prime minister Modrow to try to focus on the elections and to keep the commitment of East Germany to elections, but we also wanted to demonstrate our recognition and support of the courageous dissenters in East Berlin and East Germany. And so, we did have a visit to the Nikolai Kirche in Potsdam. This was only a month after the wall had opened and we had an opportunity to meet some of the courageous Lutheran pastors and leaders that had been leading the dissent. You couldn't help but admire and have extraordinary respect for these people that had faced incredible odds to stand for the critical rights – including, I might add, pastor Merkel at the time. But when we asked about the future, they had some rather hazy perhaps utopian notions about what they would like East Germany to be that didn't really seem to fit what we encountered in West Germany. So, I remember asking one of the pastors, "What does your congregation want?" And they said, "Ach, they want what they see on West German TV." That was revealing in a political sense because what you would recognize is that the Federal Republic of Germany was a legitimate state. This was going to be a takeover. It wasn't gonna be a merger process, and that even led to the constitutional choice of using article 23 which had been used to incorporate the Saarland as supposed to 146 to which it had been the original design.

But the momentum of people on the ground also created a risk and an opportunity. The risk was, if the process stalled, you risked a crisis, whether with remnants of the Stasi, Soviet troops, just German people being frustrated. But on the other hand, we realized we could use that momentum as part of a diplomatic pressure. Some of the other four powers were more reluctant to move on unification. But you could the events on the ground to demonstrate that you had to face decisions.

Fourth point: With all these events, there was a question of what process would you use to try to channel diplomacy without losing focus on objectives. Diplomats, as you look at the newspapers today, you recognize often focus on process. But you have to be careful that processes don't become ends within themselves. You have to make sure that the processes are linked to the objectives. This is the one area of some difference in the US government because some of our colleagues at the National Security Council just wanted to let events proceed without creating a process to channel them. With Secretary Baker we thought there would be a risk that that would lead the Soviets out of the process. And the Soviets had 380,000 troops in Germany, they had four power rights, they were the World War II victors, so we decided we needed a process to bring the Soviets along using this momentum of events on the ground. But then the question is, what group would you use? The 35 countries at the CSCE was too big, the four powers would leave out the Germanies, NATO at this time was 16, but that wouldn't include the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe. So, we came up with this idea for the two-plus-four. And the phrase itself was very important. And somewhat a subject of debate of our allies. Some would say, "Oh we should do four-plus-two or six or others." But the concept was, we wanted to have the two Germanies in the lead. We wanted to have the two Germanies first trying to capture this

momentum on the ground. And the day we settled the internal aspects while the outside four powers would then be the controls that had been left over from Potsdam.

But also there was another dimension. And that is, while Germans were understandably focusing on the internal aspects of the unification, as I mentioned, this was occurring in a larger European context. So, we used the two-plus-four in a way as a steering group to make sure there were changes in NATO, to make sure that there were changes in the CSCE, to deal with some of the economic issues where Germany made large contributions to the Soviet Union. These conventional forces negotiations which took place at a historic pace, less than two years were quite rare of conventional or any arms control negotiations of that scale. And that was important and also instead of lowering the anxiety of the Soviets because Germany made sort of arms commitments in that process.

Fifth and finally: Timing was critical. We had to move quickly but not rashly. Just consider, the wall was open on November 9 and 10, the two-plus-four-settlement was signed on September 12 - ten months later-, Germany was unified on October 3 - eleven months later. Just consider news today. What happens in ten or eleven months? And yet you had all these aspects coming together. In the middle of the process in August 1990, before the final settlement, Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait and my bosses Baker and Bush were drawn in a whole new set of issues, by December of 1990, just a few months after we finished the events, our close partner Soviet Foreign Minister Schewardnadse resigns, by the middle of next year you have a coup in the Soviet Union and Gorbatschow is gone. That was always one of our worries in the back of our minds. What would happen in Moscow in a sense that we wanted to try to reap the benefits without trying to be destabilizing.

There are other important aspects of the story including the importance of the personal ties. I have been in diplomacy or the World Bank or as a Trade Representative and one of the things I have observed is: People would have different perspectives, the critical element of trust is vital, if you are going to have an effective process. And Bush and Kohl and Baker and Genscher and their other counterparts developed a sense that they could explain to one another in the midst of this incredibly rapid set of issues and in what they were doing and thinking; and this even extended of course to Schewardnadse in particular and Gorbatschow. I remember a critical point where we were trying to make changes in NATO to make the Soviets accept the notion of united Germany in NATO, Baker briefed Schewardnadse about the changes that he wants to get in the NATO Summit. Before we knew that we could get them, so that when they were announced Schewardnadse could embrace them, Schewardnadse then later said that it was very critical for him to know this in advance so he could get ahead of some of his Soviet colleagues in embracing those changes. So just think about it. By 1990, a US Foreign Minister is briefing a Soviet Foreign Minister about changes we want to get in NATO before the NATO allies have accepted the changes, so that the Soviet Union can embrace them. That's the sort of degree of change in partnership they were trying to have. We were also frankly very fortunate to have the strong support of the American public. The American public's interest in democracy sometimes gets us in trouble around the world, in 89/90 it was a big plus for Germany, because while people in Europe might have been somewhat anxious about the idea, the American

public's view was of course Germans would want to unite and of course they had confidence in German democracy. That made our diplomatic task a lot easier over the process.

But let me close with just one of the strategic observations: Even as we were trying to close out the Cold War in Europe peacefully, we had our eye on the future. And here is where national interests become involved: We expected that Germany by reason of size, economic power, geography was going to be playing a decisive role in Europe's future as it had in Europe's past. And having tried to develop a special relationship with Germany over the course of decades of the Cold War especially with the successful closing chapter, we were hoping to leave a foundation for a future partnership. So, I would say that we would together, Americans, Germans, Europeans would be foolish to ignore the consequences of drift or worse, potential alienation or a lasting break with Germany. That is true for the 21st century as well."