

## “Riding the Wave of German Reunification”

Interviewee: Robert M. Gates

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Once the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, East and West Germany had a chance to reunify, creating challenges for the European Community, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Robert M. Gates, President George H. W. Bush’s deputy national security advisor, discusses the president’s stalwart support for German reunification and global leadership to achieve this fundamental change.

**Interviewer:** Let’s talk about another topic that we talked a little bit at various times and that’s the reunification of Germany. You just mentioned the importance of the individual in history and the reunification of Germany is often seen as one of the fundamental changes that took place during the Bush administration which we could attribute to the United States in addition to broad forces in the world such as the collapse of the Soviet Union. We talked about the President [George H. W. Bush] establishing a policy in Montana I think it was. Could you elaborate on the actual implementation of that policy?

**Robert M. Gates:** I mean, it is a very special achievement of George Bush in my view because every other leader, East and West, was against it. The French were against it, the British were against it, the Soviets were against it, the Poles were against it, the Czechs were against it, the Hungarians were against it, the Italians were against it. We were totally isolated. And it was by, just by sheer force of personality and determination that I think Bush finally got all these people on board. He had an ally in the Soviet Union in Shevardnadze. German reunification really ripped it for [Eduard] Shevardnadze. He finally ran out his string at home on German reunification. Then, the [Persian] Gulf War, and that was kind of the end for Shevardnadze. Those two things, that amounted to three strikes for him.

But, it took a lot of effort on Bush’s part, a lot of time on the telephone, a lot of time in personal meetings, to begin bringing around, above all, our European allies who did not have the same kind of faith in Germany that Bush did. And he just flat believed that the Germans had changed. I think the title of my chapter on this subject in the book is “By Faith Alone” because it was really Bush who pushed it. And the irony is, on reunification, we can talk about the speed of events and so on, just months before it happens [Helmut] Kohl says, “Well, maybe in five years we’ll get there.” So just the pace of change, and I think Bush rode that wave and in some ways directed it.

*End of excerpt.*

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