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## Victor's Justice, American Style

| [More](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

| August 30, 2010

| [Justin Logan](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

I have written <sup>[3]</sup> at some length <sup>[4]</sup> about the disconnect between international relations academics and the Beltway foreign policy community. An article by the USC historian [Mary Elise Sarotte](#) in the current issue of *International Security* <sup>[5]</sup> illustrates the phenomenon in the context of U.S. policy in Europe after the Cold War.

Sarotte uses a dazzling array of historical sources to call into question several widely-held beliefs about U.S. behavior surrounding the end of the Cold War:

[F]irst, that in 1990, consideration of NATO's future beyond its 1989 border was either nonexistent or limited solely to eastern Germany; second, that U.S. policymakers negotiated all of the key bargains with the Soviet Union, most importantly at the Washington summit of May-June 1990; and third, that, as Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry have argued, "[T]he diplomatic conversation at the end of the Cold War concerned architectures that would integrate the Soviets (and Russians) into pan-European and pan-Atlantic institutions."

The article's three main sections challenge these assumptions by showing (1) that as early as February 1990, leading Western policymakers were speculating about NATO's future, not just in eastern Germany but also in Eastern Europe; (2) that, in the endgame of the Cold War, it was not just U.S. but also West German negotiators who would play decisive roles; and (3) that their main goal was not the integration described by Deudney, Ikenberry, and others in their depictions of the United States as a liberal Leviathan. Rather, their goal was best articulated by Robert Gates, the deputy national security adviser in 1990. He summarized Bonn and Washington's strategy as follows: "to bribe the Soviets out" using the wealth of the West. Gates was thinking about divided Germany in particular, but his analysis has broader applicability

to the means by which the United States perpetuated its preeminence in European security after the Cold War.



Sarotte highlights the extent to which Washington's desire to extend its dominant position in European security affairs <sup>[6]</sup> drove American policy at the time. She cites James Baker worrying that the "real risk to NATO is CSCE," emphasizing how assiduously U.S. policymakers worked to stymie "French visions of building a new security structure based on" CSCE. She demonstrates, based on interviews with Robert Zoellick and Dennis Ross (top aides to James Baker) and Philip Zelikow (an NSC official), that Washington had already begun thinking about NATO expansion in the abstract by early 1990. By September 1990, Zoellick was refusing to sign the 2 + 4 accord to reunify Germany unless the Soviets "confirmed in an 'agreed minute' that non-German NATO troops retained the option of moving eastward over the alliance's 1989 border. Although he did not explicitly discuss Eastern Europe, Zoellick later stated he was thinking of Poland at the time."

She offers three conclusions:

First, the revolutionary events of 1989 led top-ranking Western leaders to consider significant questions about the future of European security and NATO broadly speaking, in Eastern Europe as well as in a newly united Germany. ... [G]iven that NATO ensured a leading U.S. role in transatlantic security, shielding that status quo in an era of dramatic change became the United

States' highest priority...

Second, U.S. and West German policymakers worked together to achieve the goal of shielding NATO from alternative visions for the future...

Third, this article challenges the argument that U.S. foreign policy at the end of the Cold War was generous and inclusionary...

Richard Betts [wrote](#) <sup>[7]</sup> [.pdf] knowingly that the virtual consensus in Washington about U.S. interests after the Cold War meant that NATO "expansion could proceed with practically no objections in the United States, apart from a coterie of grumpy academics who took Russia's concerns with the balance of power seriously."

Given the growing mountain of evidence regarding how prominently the desire to dominate Europe factored in American decisionmaking and how stunningly indifferent those same policymakers were to Russia's understandable concerns with the balance of power, the Beltway consensus view of the end of the Cold War may itself be ripe for reevaluation.

More by

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