

The widening Atlantic

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On 20 January 1989, George Herbert Walter Bush was sworn in as the forty-first president of the United States. Not only is this the first time since 1836 that a vice-president has directly succeeded to the White House, but George Bush is also the first president for over 60 years - since Hoover took over office from Coolidge - to have been elected out of the same party as his predecessor. Leaving personal considerations aside, then, the opportunity for continuity in America's European policy is unique.

Despite these positive omens, however, transatlantic relations over the next four years are going to be subjected to great stress. The brutal dictates of practical politics such as the creation of the single market within the EEC, the re-distribution of defence costs, or the search for a single NATO order, are going to cause inevitable "family strife," as Helmut Schmidt has put it, in the Western bloc. The question as to whether relations between Western Europe and the United States under George Bush are going to be characterized by co-operation or conflict, is therefore a crucial issue.

The Rise of the Pragmatist

Although it would be difficult to find a president in American history who began office with the same experience in international affairs, it must be said that George Bush has offered no decisive profile of foreign policy. As ambassador to the United Nations (1971-73), leader of the liaison office in the People's Republic of China (1974-75), and director of the CIA (1976-77), his loyalty to the policies of the ruling presidents and his pragmatic problem-solving have always been more important than ideologies or abstract theoretical considerations.¹

In 1980, Bush's first run as Republican candidate for president was also designed to present him as a moderate version of Ronald Reagan - a fact which eventually got him included on the Grand Old Party ticket. During his period of office as vice-president, he visited Europe several times as Reagan's special emissary, with the task of explaining the American positions regarding the Nato double option and the INF Treaty. He was also in charge of the task force created to combat international terrorism, and chairman of the crisis management group. To reproaches that he did not distinguish himself in these positions with any particularly noteworthy contributions to American foreign policy, Bush has always countered with the argument that he was acting as confidant and adviser to the president, and that he had thus had to be outwardly discreet as far as his collaboration was concerned.

There are various decisions of the administration, however, which the vice-president strongly supported and even carried out. Yet even when bringing Reagan round to a more conciliatory tone with Moscow, when trying to convince the president of his own vision of a nuclear-free world,² or when persuading him to take part in summits with Deng and Gorbachev,³ Bush always appeared as an undocrinized pragmatist. He described his political philosophy during his 1980 pre-electoral campaign: "I am a practical man. I like what's real ... I'm not much for theory and abstract; I like what works. I am not a mystic, and I do not yearn to lead a crusade."⁴

After his mid-August nomination as presidential candidate in New Orleans, American public opinion witnessed a clearly ideological George Bush. He increasingly used Reagan's rhetoric in outlining the concepts of his foreign policy. But this was due more to the demands of the election campaign itself than to any change in his foreign policy thinking, and it would even be true to say that there were questions of foreign policy which remained in the shadow.⁵

While Reagan had made "anti-communism" a cornerstone value of his campaigns in 1980 and 1984, Bush's was dominated by themes such as the struggle against crime, and patriotism. In the latter's election campaign, as was traditional, Europe played little or no role. The first few times Bush made speeches on the fundamental concepts of his foreign policy, Europe was not included, except as an area for troop stationing or reduction.⁶ Under the slogan "Europe and the Defense of the West," the Republican electoral platform was correspondingly limited to an appeal to the Europeans to avoid protectionism in their trade with the US, and to respect the rules of fair play. It was also

emphasized that all NATO members "should bear their share of the defense burden."⁷

As it can be seen, then, that assurance for the practical details of future co-operation with Europe, at least as far as concrete examples are concerned, are not to be had, either from Bush's electoral speeches or from his previous political activity, it is worth taking a good look at the composition of his foreign policy team.

The New/Old Team

The day after his election, Bush named his election manager James Baker as Secretary of State, and this rapidity alone indicates just how important a role Baker is going to have in the administration.⁸ An old traveling companion and close personal friend of the president, he is thus seen by observers as a kind of "superminister" in the new cabinet.⁹ No president and Secretary of State have been so close since Truman and Acheson, in fact, and no Secretary of State has had such great power since Kissinger. Now like Bush, Baker advocates a pragmatic and undoctinated line in foreign policy. As chief-of-staff during Reagan's first period of office, and Secretary of the Treasury from 1985 to 1988, he had to deal with international problems time and time again. It is generally expected that in close co-operation with the re-nominated Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady, Baker will link economic and foreign policy more tightly than in the Reagan administration did.¹⁰

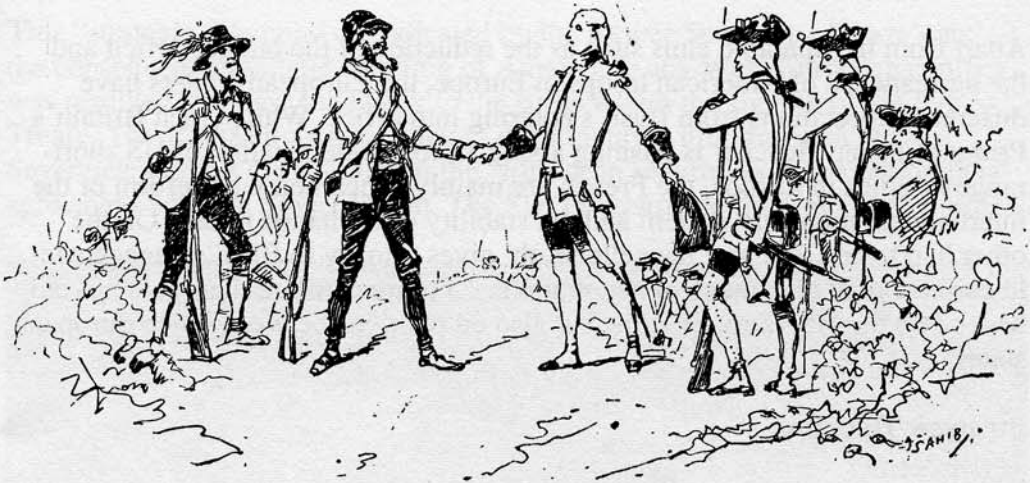
Bush has also filled all the other key foreign policy posts with experienced men. Airforce General Brent Scowcroft takes over as national security adviser, a job he has already successfully done under President Ford, and in making this nomination, Bush has kept in mind the role of "honest broker" which ought to facilitate communication between the authorities involved in foreign policy.¹¹

The only figure who does not fit into this framework of undoctinated and pragmatic, problem-oriented leadership, then, is the new vice-president, Dan Quayle. On the contrary, the latter's period as senator earned him a reputation as a "superhawk," though his counseling during the INF Treaty negotiations was characterized by thoroughly pragmatic concepts. It is true that during the Senate debate, together with the ultra-conservative Jesse Helms, he posed most of the problems, but he then supported a "killer amendment" and ended up by not voting against the treaty.¹² As Quayle has no close connections with the

inner circle around Bush, however, his influence will remain limited. In the new Administration, he will have above all the job of linking the bearers of the "Reagan Revolution," the conservative wing of the Republican party, to the new president.

Collision Course

A further positive aspect in the new foreign policy leadership team is that they all enjoy good relations with Congress. Brady and Quayle were senators, and Bush himself served as member of the House of Representatives in the late Sixties. Baker and Scowcroft are old and well-known hands on Capitol Hill, and also enjoy good reputations there. Immediately after the elections, the new administration had signaled its readiness to compromise in a message to the legislative branch: "There will definitely be a disposition to work with the Congress, while with the Reagan administration there was an inclination to try and run over it."¹³ Over the coming years, Bush will certainly need an experienced team to establish a good working climate with Congress. Contrary to Reagan in 1980 and 1984, he had no "coattails" which Republican candidates could have got hold of to get into Congress, and this is why the Democrats were able to strengthen their position in both Houses.



Lafayette's arrival in America.

Although there is now the opportunity for foreign policy independent of party influence for the first time in many years, it is European policy which might just be the source of trouble between the executive and legislative branches. Unlike the president, in fact, the people's elected representatives are daily under direct pressure from their supporters in the agricultural or industrial constituencies, and both of these pressure groups are strongly critical towards Europe. An anticipation of this problem can be seen in the controversy between the American ambassador in Bonn, Richard Burt, and a congresswoman from Colorado, Patricia Schroeder. According to the latter, Burt should represent the interests of the US more vigorously, instead of trying to promote sympathy and understanding for Germany.¹⁴

Great Expectations?

The news of Bush's electoral victory was generally received with relief in the European capitals.¹⁵ He has repeatedly visited Europe over the last eight years, is well aware of the various problems, and knows most of the heads of government personally. His appointment decisions, and above all Baker's nomination as Secretary of State, have been unanimously praised in Europe. And an advantage not to be under-estimated is the fact that he is on good terms with Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl. The negative example of the personal animosity between Jimmy Carter and Helmut Schmidt, and the resulting friction in transatlantic relations, is still fresh to the eyes of all.

Apart from indisputable aims such as the reduction of the budget deficit and the permanence of American troops in Europe, the European leaders have different expectations from Bush's entering into office. While Great Britain's Prime Minister Thatcher is pushing above all for modernization of US short-range missiles in Europe, the French are mainly concerned with reform of the international monetary system and the stability of exchange rates.¹⁶ On the other hand, the German Chancellor Kohl gives priority to Bush's engagement in conventional disarmament negotiations.¹⁷ Future conflict, then, will not only depend on the US-Europe nexus, but also on relations between inner-European states.

Strategic Dilemma

Despite the reassuring signals given by the new administration in the European direction, there may be said to be four areas of conflict concerning future US-

Europe relations. They are all inter-connecting themes and are getting mutually sharper: the future of NATO, the American trade and budget deficits, Gorbachev's pretensions for the future, and trade conflict between Brussels and Washington.

The first issue is the future of the Alliance - an existential theme. The conclusion of the nuclear intermediate-range missile elimination agreement (the INF Treaty), emphasized the opposing structural interests of the two NATO supports - the US and Europe. The scrapping of this "important, and from a European point of view decisive means of dissuasion,"¹⁸ caused an unexpectedly violent return to certain problems which have been discussed by the Alliance for many years. Controversies arising from this, then, will dominate NATO policy over the coming years.

An initial problem is the search for a global concept of the Alliance which will suffice until the turn of the century, and in 1978, Henry Kissinger had already indicated the difficulties inherent in this enterprise: "If my analysis is correct we must face the fact that it is absurd to base the strategy of the West on the credibility of the threat of mutual suicide ... and therefore I would say - what I might not say in office - that our European allies should not keep asking us to multiply strategic assurances ... our strategic dilemma is not solved by verbal assurances, it requires redesigning our forces and doctrine."¹⁹

This "strategic dilemma" as indicated by the former Secretary of State - and the consequent automatic coupling of America to any West-European conflict - was resolved, but has come back to the surface with the signing of the INF Treaty. The US has thus gone back to the strategy it introduced in the Seventies: finding the solution of the "European security problem" through an agreement with the Soviet Union. The SDI program and the Reykjavik Summit

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negotiations must also be seen in this connection, and proposals such as the plan for "discriminate deterrence,"²⁰ worked out by non-official experts, aim along the same lines.

The Europeans have reacted to Washington's change in global strategy with an attempt to resuscitate the West European Union (WEU), which is designed to assert European interests within the Alliance more strongly. In addition to this, Bonn and Paris have also established a common defence committee at government level to co-ordinate manoeuvres and military projects - all under the suspicious eyes of Great Britain and Italy. The most striking expression of this latter co-operation is the constitution of a common German-French Brigade.

From the above it may be seen that the situation in security policy at the end of this decade is not dissimilar to that of the early Fifties, Germany and France being the cornerstones of a European defence community (the one which formerly failed in 1954), and London acting as a brake on military integration, intent on reinforcing its "special relationship" with the US. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is particularly opposed to any attempts to create "substructures" to the cost of NATO.²¹ Future development will entirely depend on whether the members of the Alliance succeed in harnessing the energy liberated by this strategic re-thinking, and using it to reinforce risk-sharing on both sides of the Atlantic. The first signals from the European capitals and Washington have been encouraging,²² but it is still not clear which orientations and aims West European co-operation should have in security policy.

A second problem is the future role of the nuclear weapons remaining in Europe after the INF Treaty.²³ The basic controversial point here is whether the nuclear missile arsenal should be modernized, as indicated in the decision of the NATO nuclear planning group on October 27, 1983, in Montebello, Canada, or whether there is no need for modernization at the present moment. Mrs. Thatcher has repeatedly argued for efficient modernization,²⁴ and her wish is also supported by the US and France. Bonn, however, has a special role in the Alliance. Chancellor Kohl explicitly recognizes the necessity for nuclear weapons in Europe, of course, although during his first meeting with Bush he explained - mainly out of consideration for domestic political opinion and his Liberal coalition partner - that modernization, and in particular that of the 88 Lance missiles, is first to be established as part of a "global NATO concept."²⁵

Finally, the middle-range treaty has added new fuel to the debate over the strength and equipment of the conventional armed forces in Western Europe, as these will now have greater significance in NATO defence strategy. Bush's chief foreign policy aide Scowcroft made it clear during the election campaign that under a Bush administration, unilateral removal of American troops from Europe would be out of the question, though he announced talks over future burden sharing with the Allies at the same time.²⁶ And the influential chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sam Nunn, has also just declared that he will put up to the vote again his 1984 amendment, which provides for the removal of 90,000 soldiers from Europe over a three-year period, if the allies do not adhere to their defence commitments: "I am in a sense still watching and waiting to see if my amendment should remain on the shelf."²⁷

"Defence policy" advocates of "burden sharing" have recently received support from members of Congress, who have drawn their arguments from the negative US trade deficit. Texas Congressman John Bryant has threatened: "I'm happy to keep troops (overseas) as long as necessary but I'm not happy to pay the bill indefinitely for countries that take us to the cleaners on trade."²⁸

Despite the tension on Capitol Hill, however, legislative measures regarding burden sharing have so far been rejected by a solid majority. In any case, this debate will get more heated over the next few years - between Congress and the president, as also within NATO.

The Double-Bladed Deficit

West European heads of government are constantly accusing the American budget and trade deficits of being a major burden to transatlantic relations.²⁹ Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher even called the budget deficit the only "fundamental difference" between London and Washington.³⁰ Looked at from a purely economic point of view, the consequences of the twin deficits are, however, over-estimated. If the share of annual borrowing of all the local authorities is based on the gross national product, then the American national debt is within the 1988 European average. Nevertheless, due to low national saving rates, Washington is obliged to finance this deficit with foreign capital, and thus a high real interest rate in international terms is necessary. This means an outflow of European capital into the US, and therefore a downward trend in the European domestic trade cycle. Yet at the end of 1988, this danger no longer seems so threatening: on the one hand, American savings rates have

risen, while on the other hand, fears of recession in most of the EEC countries have been vanquished thanks to the high 1988 growth rates.

The situation is no more dramatic if the American balance-of-trade deficit is analyzed.³¹ This is not so much due to the rise in the dollar before 1985, or due to any reduced competitiveness of the US economy; above all it is a consequence of the South American debt crisis, and the longest-ever period of prosperity in American history, with growth rates clearly above the European average. Now it is common experience that a flourishing economy triggers off an import inflow. The deficit will thus be reduced when the run on imported goods calms down, and when US consumption rates ease off, a tendency which is already taking place.

Further "talking down" of the dollar in order to reduce the trade deficit - a European nightmare - offers no promise of success, as American industry is already witnessing capacity bottlenecks: in the short term it is unable to export more. The only consequence of such a step would thus be an import-induced stimulation of inflation. After entering into office, Treasury Secretary Brady made it immediately clear that he would not be interested in any further reduction of the dollar rate: "The administration is committed to exchange market stability. The key to that stability is the economic policy coordination process, including cooperation in exchange markets."³²

American efforts to persuade the Europeans - and above all the German Federal Republic - to pursue an active trade cycle policy, have yet to come, probably retarded thanks to the high 1988 European growth rates. Memory of the stock market crash is also still fresh, and it must be remembered that what directly triggered off the crisis were attacks on Bonn's economic policy by the Secretary of the Treasury at that time, James Baker.

The fact that these economic data do not justify any crisis scenario for transatlantic relations, however, does not mean that they might not act as "material" for conflict at a political level. In internal American discussions, the German and Japanese trade surpluses are often wrongly contrasted with the American deficit. Objectively, though, there is no chronic lack of balance in trade between either the Federal Republic and the US, or between Europe and the US.³³ Despite all this, demands are being made, especially in Congress, to justify more European engagement in conventional arms with inequalities in trade balances.

There are even murmurs of reducing the budget deficit by cutting back on American commitments in Europe.³⁴

Secretary of Commerce Clayton Yeutter, then American trade delegate, thus instrumentalized the German foreign trade committee in order to criticize Bonn's agreement to cover any possible exchange-rate risk for Airbus production in case of entry of Daimler-Benz into Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm (the German Airbus mother company): "It is also incongruous and indefensible for West Germany, a country enjoying an extraordinarily large trade surplus, to be subsidizing through exchange rate guarantees, recapitalization/debt forgiveness or other mechanisms a product primarily intended for export."³⁵

From statements such as these to protectionist demands, the bridge is only a short one, and the passing of an aggressive trade law last summer was a taste of just this.

During the election campaign, George Bush repeatedly assured that he would oppose this kind of demand with the greatest of energy, though he did plead for "fair trade" at the same time: "As president ... I will knock down trade barriers, and, over a reasonable period of time, I will relentlessly pursue negotiations to end subsidies that distort markets and restrict trade. But we must act in concert with our trading partners. I will not act unilaterally."³⁶

In case of a trial of strength with Congress over the subject of free trade, Bush certainly holds worse cards than his predecessor did, considering the Democratic majority in Congress and the widespread protectionist movements active today.

An unexpected problem: Gorbachev

There are historical precedents in the Sixties and Seventies for both of the areas of possible transatlantic conflict as described above. In the case of Mikhail Gorbachev's policies, however, the West is having to deal with a challenge which has no precedents at all. Only four years after gaining office, the Soviet General Secretary has managed to make enormous breaches in Western public opinion. And London and Paris have both recently warned against the West Germans threatening to fall for Gorbachev's charm. Yet surveys in the meantime show that the situation in their own countries is no

different. To the question as to which politician had made the greatest contribution to peace, 18% of the British subjects interviewed replied Bush, and some 60% replied Gorbachev.³⁷

The Soviet chief's success here is not only based on his undoubted charisma, and in particular, he has managed to expose the contradictions inherent in Western defence policy. Moscow can rightly triumph over the fact that the zero variation in the intermediate-range missile arsenal, which only a few years ago Washington would have proposed in the expectation of receiving Soviet refusal, has been turned against its very originators.³⁸ At the time, NATO debates over the modernization of tactical nuclear arms in Europe pointed out that the military and political threat represented by the Soviet Union is perceived quite differently in various quarters.

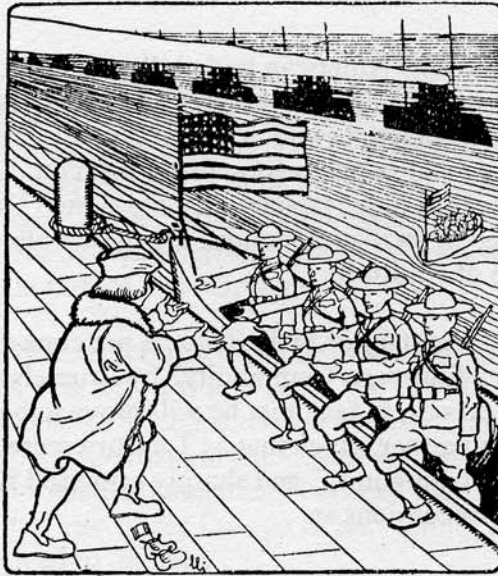
This differentiated view of the Soviet Union amongst the allies is not only manifest in questions of security policy. From the American point of view, it is above all European economic co-operation with the Soviet Union - and especially that with the Federal Republic and Italy - which is followed with some scepticism. Conflict such as the natural gas pipeline controversy in 1982 would not appear to be exclusively European, however. Secretary of State Baker has certainly recommended caution in widening economic relations with the Soviet Union, but has at the same time argued against a bill which would have allowed the president to limit or even forbid credit from American banks.³⁹

Washington is sensitive regarding technological equipment which is on the CoCom list, and will undoubtedly react if it is exported to the East. Here, then, is material for future conflict, and the parting administration has announced its opposition to the construction of a high-temperature reactor in the Soviet Union by an industrial consortium under the Federal German wing. And since Bush repeatedly warned against illusions over Gorbachev's reform policies during the election campaign, the new Administration will certainly keep to as strict an interpretation of the CoCom list as possible - the more so as American firms have only a marginal proportion of trade with the East.

Brussels vs. Washington

With the rapid worsening of the American balance-of-payments since 1983, there has also been sharper confrontation in commercial exchange between the

US and the EEC, and the central controversy here is the agricultural market. Memory is still fresh of the so-called "pasta-war," and American claims for compensation following the Common Market's expansion to the South, and new conflictual areas may already be seen. Thus, for example, on



Columbus greeting US troops in Genoa during World War I.

January 1, 1989 the Common Market will introduce an import ban on hormone-treated meat, a step which Washington has been attacking as discriminatory and illegal for years.⁴⁰ In Brussels, furthermore, the Community has rejected the demand made by the US during the 1987 GATT meeting, for the gradual elimination of all agricultural subsidies by the end of the century. The Airbus controversy, which has already been going on for some time, has recently acquired new impetus. Negotiations between the Brussels Commission and representatives of the American government have so far brought no progress on these issues: the contrary, in fact, is true, and as Belgian Commissioner Willy de Clercq stated after the latest exchange of opinions at the end of November: "The gap is widening."⁴¹

Before this background, over the last few months there has been a change in the American reaction to the announcement that a vast open EEC market will

be created by January 1, 1993. The official American government line, that "the United States supports economic integration" with respect to "1992" was weakened over the summer by the addition of the phrase "in principle." Over and above this, acting American trade delegate Andrew Stoler has made it clear that Washington is getting less and less disposed to bear the costs of European union.⁴²

On January 1, 1989, the new American trade bill comes into force. Its most important principle is that the administration will have to intensify its actions against any foreign trade practices which hinder American exports. This is a new kind of attempt to acquire markets by force, and could have just as dangerous consequences as older protectionist measures. This trade bill obliges the president to engage in retaliatory actions if negotiations fail, and thus accelerates escalation of conflicts.

In addition to all this, Secretary of State Baker is not considered "an enormous friend of the European Community" by Brussels officials. There is the fear in Brussels, in fact, that he will prove to be a thoroughly aggressive negotiating partner, given that as Treasury secretary he had "a minimalist view of the community" and sharply criticised EEC positions on numerous occasions.⁴³

Bush and the Europeans

Seldom has an American president gathered around himself such an experienced team in international questions as George Bush. They are all Washington professionals, and their political standpoints are well known to Europeans. With their return to the *realpolitik* of Presidents Nixon and Ford, US policy toward Europe will become much more predictable.

This presence of *realpolitik*, however, means that the different structural interests to be found within the Alliance will come to the surface more forcefully. With the Reykjavik summit meeting, Washington was already returning to the old idea of satisfying its security interests through "partial duopoly" (E. -O. Czempel) with Moscow. Over the next few years, then, Western Europe will be confronted by the same problems which Nixon's and Kissinger's *détente* policy had formerly posed: greater dependence and less influence.⁴⁴ Europe will therefore have to take this opportunity to emancipate itself both politically and militarily from the US.

George Bush's main political task will be to forge a coherent strategy in the West in reply to Gorbachev's challenges. If the president does not succeed, there is the risk that Europe might find its own individual political paths, with each single government trying to establish a separate "privileged" relationship with Moscow. It would not take long for this to have an effect on the Western defence alliance.

The American budget and trade deficits have become overly significant, and it is up to Bush - and Baker! - to resume the course of transatlantic co-operation in the sectors of monetary and economic policy. The first indications here are encouraging. On the other hand, it is to be feared that relations between Brussels and Washington, under continuing pressure from agricultural and industrial interests, will be characterized by lack of co-operation and lack of strategies which might reduce this conflict.

Despite all the areas of conflict which can be predicted for transatlantic relations over the next few years, the US - European relationship will continue to be characterized by pre-ordained, supra-national interests. Washington's geo-strategic and economic interests in Europe, together with the ideological homogeneity between the Old and New worlds, will ensure that also under George Bush, "family strife" in the West is not going to lead to divorce.

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- ⁷ - Cf. "Republican Foreign Policy: Strength, Realism, Dialogue, Excerpts: Republican platform on foreign policy," in *U.S. Policy Information and Texts* no.155, August 17, 1988.
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- ³⁹ - Cf. Dale, Reginald: "Bush Gets Praise on Baker," in *IHT*, November 11, 1988.
- ⁴⁰ - Fliess, Barbara A.: "Aktuelle Spannungsfelder in den amerikanisch-europäischen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen," in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 52, December 26, 1987.
- ⁴¹ - Cf. "Der Graben zwischen Washington und Brüssel wird breiter," in *FAZ*, November 21, 1988.
- ⁴² - Cf. "U.S. Officials Remain Cautious Over EC Integration," in *U.S. Policy Information and Texts*, no. 207, November 1988.
- ⁴³ - Quoted from Dale, Reginald: "Bush Gets Praise on Baker," in *IHT*, November 11, 1988.
- ⁴⁴ - Cf. Czempel, Ernst-Otto: "Die Weltpolitik der Reagan Administration," in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 44, 28 October, 1988.