

forward in his address to the UN General Assembly in December 1988: (a) the avoidance of any military intervention not only between military alliances but also within them, and (b) the sovereign right of each people to choose its own social system must be protected.

The initial Western response to Gorbachev's concept noted its vagueness. But so far, no more precise or generally agreed vision of a future European order that would embrace the USSR and the East European countries has been produced in the West. For the time being, one formidable inhibition, deterring both sides from precise thinking about Europe's future, is the sudden eruption of the "German problem" -- the issue of the kind of relationship that should develop between the two Germanies. The principles Gorbachev himself has enunciated, suggest that the solution should be left to the German people themselves. But, for Gorbachev especially, certain historical factors have their continuing relevance and give this complex issue a crucial international dimension. Among them are the absence of a German Peace Treaty, the establishment of a socialist system in East Germany, and the Helsinki Final Act's call for no European border change by force.

Gorbachev sought (in vain, as events in Germany have now shown) to insist on the continuing existence of the two German states for an indefinite interim period. If the current accelerated treatment of German unification³ represents a serious setback for Gorbachev's European policy, he can nevertheless now be confident from his December meetings with Bush in Malta and Mitterand in Kiev, and from concurrent Western meetings in Brussels and Strasbourg, that the West shares his views on the need for restraint on these matters and on the desirability of constructive East-West cooperation to deal with the difficult problems they pose. At a Plenum of the Soviet Party Central Committee on 9 December, where he also welcomed the political changes taking place in Eastern Europe, Gorbachev described the transformation of Western attitudes towards the Soviet Union and the undertakings he had obtained, notably at the Malta summit, as an historic turning-point in East-West relations, facilitating not only the resolution of

³ The term "unification", as meaning the bringing together of the two German states within the post-1945 borders, is now being increasingly used to replace the term "reunification" which, it is thought, might possibly suggest that a unified Germany is to be restored to its 1937 or 1939 borders.