Germany reunification must consider territorial concerns

Column by Karl Dishaw

Before the end of this summer a unified German Parliament will be meeting in Berlin. That cannot be avoided, no matter how much effort reparation statements put into slowing it. The German people have acquired too much momentum to be stopped.

Already the city government of East Berlin has asked West Berlin to take over municipal services since the steady stream of emigrants has weakened their ability to carry out national functions. Even if it wasn't necessary to prevent a collapse most Germans would want reunification—just because it is no part of a future Soviet Socialist Republic, Poles.

West Germany party takes an eastern affiliate under its wing for the coming East German elections. If the East is simply added to the Federal Republic, the Eastern legislatures will already know where to take their seats in the Bundestag.

Merging the two currencies, reuniting the emigrants, restoring services in the East and managing new investment—are these problems with which German bureaucrats and accountants will be wrestling for years. But there aren't any show-stoppers among them. East Germany would like better housing, but it can't prevent unification. Only a concerted effort by many other nations could block reunification.

But this is unlikely if the Germans give proper consideration to the worries of their neighbors. Most world leaders today were alive when Nazi Germany devastated Europe and many, including President Bush, fought in that war. The threat posed by an unchecked Germany makes many Europeans—including the Soviet Union, which lost 20 million people from the German invasion in World War II—very apprehensive. Germany must be reassured on two key issues: borders and alliances. A united Germany will be accepted by the rest of the world if it respects current borders and remains in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Alliance. Otherwise, nations will begin negotiating treaties to ensure peace.

Unity has not been Germany's normal condition in history. As an ethnic group the Germans go back beyond Julius Caesar, but the Empire of Charlemagne (Karl der Grosse, to them) was the first political entity to encompass them. That quickly dissolved but left the legacy of the Holy Roman Empire, which regrew (or distilled) over most of modern Germany. The empire finally vanished in the 1600s, leaving a varied assortment of feudal states dominated by Prussia and Austria. German unity was a subject for idle chatter until West Germany was formed. Today it is a political reality.

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