

The Atlantic Community Unraveling?

States, Protest Movements, and the Transformation of US-European Relations, 1969-1983
The Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, September 17-19, 2004

A conference of historians organized by *Matthias Schulz* in cooperation with *Thomas A. Schwartz* (both Vanderbilt University) and *Bernd Schäfer* (GHI Washington) gathered at Vanderbilt University from Sept 17-19, 2004, with the objective to analyze the transformation of the transatlantic partnership during the period from the arrival of President Richard Nixon, President Georges Pompidou, and Chancellor Brandt in power in 1969, to the implementation of the NATO double-track decision in 1983. For the full conference program, see <http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/page/jE5Y7C>.

In Europe, the time period saw a growing influence of new social movements upon politics, the rise of German 'Ostpolitik', and a re-launching of the European integration process with important repercussions on the US-European relationship. In the U.S., the preoccupation with Vietnam, the decline of the dollar, a domestic crisis of confidence, and the challenge of radical Islamic fundamentalism triggered a shift in the balance of power vis-à-vis Western Europe and resulted in struggles over the direction and leadership of the Alliance. On the basis of American, Canadian, and West European archival sources and other documents, the participants tried to look at the intersections of these overlapping processes, and their consequences for transatlantic partnership. The conveners were interested, on the one hand, in how new social movements and changing mentalities altered the outlook of decision-makers, and thereby the basis for transatlantic partnership during this period. On the other hand they asked in their Call for papers how the Alliance dealt with conflicts of interest, how it followed rules of consultation, and how it used multilateral institutions to achieve or maintain cohesion. Most of the paper proposals received addressed the latter set of questions, as still too few social and cultural historians seem to be interested in the broader question of how social and cultural changes influence foreign policy.

1. The "Atlantic Community" and the Role of Europe

The notion "Atlantic Community" embodied US-President John F. Kennedy's design for a remodeled transatlantic partnership based upon two pillars, America and Western Europe. It was formulated during the height of the Cold War, partly in response to the second Berlin crisis and the Cuban missile crisis, partly in response to the creation of the European Common Market and efforts by the Europe of the Six to build a political union. Kennedy and his advisers envisaged strengthening the Atlantic Alliance through a united Europe, a multilateral (Atlantic) nuclear force and a liberal trade order enshrined in the GATT-negotiations later dubbed "Kennedy-Round". It was welcomed by the majority of West European leaders and public opinion in the early sixties, but parts of it were rejected by French President Charles De Gaulle as an instrument of American hegemony.[1] Nevertheless, it continued to inform the thinking of a significant portion of the political elite in both the U.S. and Western Europe about transatlantic relations for at least a generation. In particular, Jean Monnet and Helmut Schmidt held the view that European integration was the basis for a strong European pillar in the "Atlantic Community" and therefore the prerequisite for a true "partnership of equals" between the United States and 'Europe'. [2] But in practice European interests and European integration on the one hand, and transatlantic partnership on the other, were often at odds with

each other. While the Cold War had produced the resolve among leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to overcome problems and find common denominators even when interests or perspectives diverged, the rise of détente during the late 1960s and 1970s weakened the basis for a close transatlantic partnership. With the gradual crumbling of the Soviet empire, the Alliance achieved its objective, but lost a vital part of its mission. And due to the condescending treatment of allies by the current (Bush) U.S. administration and the war on Iraq, which is illegal under international law and was waged under false pretensions, the Atlantic alliance is practically dead, one of the numerous casualties of the expanded, so-called "War on Terror" and the disastrously executed occupation of Iraq.[3] Whether the alliance can be revived in the future is debatable.

2. *Changing Perceptions of America*

In the introduction *M. Schulz* pointed out that Vietnam and Watergate, the fiscal and monetary policies of the United States, and insecurity about how much Washington's nuclear umbrella was really worth led to a growing scepticism towards the United States both among elites, and public opinion in Western Europe during the time period. Those shifting perceptions are reflected in polls. In West Germany, the percentage of people having a favorable view of the United States minus those having an unfavorable view had been high throughout the sixties, and has reached a sympathy-driven top score in 1964 with 84% (compared to Italy with 74%, Britain 66%, and France 41% in the same year, each of which represents the highest score of favorable views in the respective country since World War II).[4] In the early seventies, the approval ratings tumbled dramatically. In West Germany, a lowpoint was reached in 1973 when only 45% had a favorable view of the United States. In Great Britain, Italy and France, the rate sank even lower, with only 24%, 25%, and 28%, respectively, in 1976. Scores recovered briefly in 1978, tumbled again, and then recovered only very slowly to moderate levels at the end of the eighties when President Reagan was warming up for détente.

3. *Consultation and Its Discontents*

After Charles De Gaulle stepped down in France in 1969 virtually all political leaders in the Western camp declared themselves in favor of close consultations and cooperation. Yet as D. Geyer and other participants demonstrated, the Nixon administration's preoccupation with the war in Vietnam led to a neglect of its relations with Western Europe, and the West European governments more frequently perceived their interests as being different from Washington's, and the United States being indifferent, if not hostile, to their own. While Germany and the U.S. consulted regularly on Ostpolitik, the Nixon White House was neutral in public, yet behind closed doors skeptical and apparently envied Brandt's success in seizing the initiative to re-define relations with the Soviet Union and the countries behind the Iron curtain. As *G. Niedhart* and Sarah Snyder pointed out, West Germany not only pushed ahead with its 'Ostpolitik', but also took the lead in the negotiations culminating in the Helsinki Declaration of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, whereas the U.S. government tried to control Western European activities from the sidelines, with little success.

Given the deteriorating situation of the US-dollar and perceiving a lack of influence on their American ally, the Heads of State and Government of the EC decided on their summit in The Hague in December 1969 to set up a framework for political cooperation, draw up plans for monetary union, and begin talks about the first round of enlargement with Britain, Denmark, Ireland, and Norway (the latter which later rejected entry). These initiatives were designed to shelter European currencies from a U.S. fiscal policy that increasingly undermined the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates, to give the EC more clout politically and economically, and strengthen "Europe's voice" vis-à-vis the United States (*C. Hiepel*). *W. Gray* and *H. Zimmermann* specifically analyze the tumbling of the Bretton Woods system in the early seventies and the reluctant shift of West Germany's D-Mark policies from an Atlantic to a European perspective. The demise of Bretton Woods initially accelerated the movement towards European integration, but the continued

fall of the dollar also made it more difficult. At the same time, it cannot be said that the initiatives taken at The Hague were intended to break with the United States; on the contrary, the Europeans were essentially reacting and moving on out of necessity. *Raj Roy* points out in a case study on the Anglo-American Rolls Royce-Lockheed crisis of 1970/71, how even the strongly pro-European government of Edward Heath made great strides to satisfy their ally and maintain the “special relationship”. On the other hand, *Werner Lippert* demonstrated in his paper on the gas-pipeline deal that the U.S. government no more had the leverage to thwart West European policies towards the Soviet Union. According to Lippert the deal amounted to an unnecessary sell-out of German interests and Western technology to the East, but it remains to be asked why the French had also tried to secure gas from the Soviets. The degree of support from West European governments for the FRG on the issue still requires closer examination.

4. *The “Year of Europe”: A Revealing Initiative*

More controversial was the debate on the “Year of Europe”-Initiative taken by U.S. National Security adviser Henry Kissinger. On the basis of recently declassified archival materials *Bob Wampler* explained that, by 1973, the White House became increasingly concerned that the European integration process might produce a rival to American power. Without consulting the European allies Kissinger declared 1973 to be the “Year of Europe” with the purpose to re-assert U.S. leadership. While all major European governments reacted in a negative manner at first, Britain, France, and West Germany had difficulties to formulate a unified response after the oil crisis hit in the fall of 1973. *D. Moeckli, A. Noble, and F. Hilfrich* analyzed archival documents of the major European political actors and showed how the European governments, depending in varying degrees from the U.S., jockeyed for positions from 1973 to 1974. While their conclusions differ, it might be said in the end that there was a lack of consensus about whether and how the European edifice should be co-opted with transatlantic partnership. The initiative revealed more about what didn’t work in the transatlantic realm than provide remedies.

5. *Excursion into the Present: Germany, America, and the Iraq Crisis*

The first day of the conference ended with a keynote lecture on the past and present of German-American relations by General Lieutenant *William E. Odom*. As Director of the National Security Agency under President Reagan, General Odom was responsible for the nation’s signals intelligence and communications security. Earlier he had served as Military Assistant to President Carter’s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, and from 1981 to 1985 as Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, the Army’s senior intelligence officer. General Odom, who was on duty in Germany several times during the Cold War, considered Germany the “lynchpin” in U.S. relations with Europe: “When the U.S. and Germany have had strong ties, the result has been peace and prosperity in Europe”. After an extended discourse on the cultural ties created by migration, the Allied occupation in Germany and the post-WWII special relationship, Odom emphasized that the Atlantic Alliance remains a crucial prerequisite for managing global stability and its maintenance should be the most important long-term objective of American foreign policy. He criticized the current (Bush) administration as slighting Europe, and the War against Iraq as “straining the alliance” and a misguided expansion of the war against the terrorist network al Qaeda. Asked about whether bad intelligence led to the wrong decisions by the White House, Odom responds: “Trying to blame this situation in Iraq on bad intelligence is just fooling the American public ... it all depends on who’s using the intelligence”. The Bush administration, he claims, has given the Islamic and Arab world too many reasons to unite against the U.S.[5]

6. Back to History: The Road to Monetary Europe and the NATO Double-Track Decision

On the second day of the conference, presentations focused primarily on the second half of the seventies, where less archival material is available. *M. Schulz* discussed the strategies used by Chancellor Helmut Schmidt with a view to influence a U.S. government that had to deal with severe domestic problems and a crisis of legitimacy. A striking feature of Schmidt's policy seems to be his preference for multilateral intergovernmental frameworks to bind in the United States, where possible, and to coordinate European responses independently, where necessary. Thus Schmidt, still as Minister of Finance, opted for energy talks on a transatlantic level in February 1974, and, as Chancellor, for the summits of the six (later seven) leading industrial nations' leaders in 1975. On the other hand, he supported the establishment of the European Council as a gubernative body of the EC and, faced with a precipitous decline of the US-dollar and several other clashes with President Jimmy Carter, he opted for the creation of a European Monetary System (EMS) in 1978, which required an extended commitment of the FRG to back other European currencies. Schmidt considered the European option only when the U.S. failed to respond to his initiatives, but after several setbacks gained the conviction that Europe had to be strengthened on the basis of Franco-German cooperation. He was a reluctant European. *J. Scholtyseck's* presentation on the NATO double-track decision of 1979 continues the topic of transatlantic relations during the Schmidt years until Kohl took over, in the fall of 1982, and implemented the deployment of Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles in 1983. The rise of the missile gap and the reasonable NATO double-track decision brought to the fore the rise of domestic protest movements in West Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark, among other countries, and the question how the shifting sand of domestic mentalities affected policy makers. It also caused concern among leaders who were afraid that the U.S.-European partnership would unravel under the pressure of domestic protest movements, e.g. when half a million peace protesters rallied against the double-track decision in Bonn in 1981. The Alliance did not yet unravel, but it was undoubtedly severely strained. Political elites outside the European Social Democratic and more leftist parties were largely convinced that the missile gap could be exploited by a Soviet leadership that was about to reach a crucial first-strike superiority in Europe. On the contrary, Western European public mentalities had been irreversibly affected by détente. Even counterfactual evidence like the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in December 1979 and the threat of an invasion in Poland did not keep the peace movement from spreading. Some leaders, like Schmidt, confronted the domestic challenge by addressing the issues directly with the peace protesters. Others, like "Canada's Peacenic Prime Minister" Pierre Trudeau, joined them, as *G. Donaghy* of the Canadian Archives for Foreign Affairs showed eloquently on the basis of newly declassified documents, and did their utmost to pursue the second track (negotiations) of the NATO-decision. Schmidt also pressed hard for negotiations. But in the face of Soviet obstinacy this course was bound to fail.

7. Terrorism and the Challenge of Islamic Fundamentalism: European and U.S. Responses

Finally, *M. Hampton* and *I. Hussain* took a look at domestic terrorism, the rise of Islamic radicalism in the Middle East in the 1970s, and European and American responses to it, respectively. Hampton states that today's problems can be better understood when looking at how terrorism was perceived and defined in the 1970s, when the U.S. defined terrorism at home as "militancy", and only non-state aggression abroad, beginning essentially with the Iran Hostage Crisis, as terrorism. On the other hand, Europeans perceive terrorism still in the perspective of their experience with what they termed terrorism in the seventies (and which falls under militancy by U.S. definition), thus underestimating the quality of the present threat. Hussain, in addition, claims that flawed decisions taken in the 1970s by successive U.S. governments, including a hard-line stance against the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), a rather one-sided support of Israel against the Palestinians, and Carter's backing of the Shah in Iran – the most isolated and undeserving leader in the region – fired Islamic radicalism and the building of transnational terrorist networks. The U.S. was given the image of the "Great Satan", as the exiled Iranian Khomeini put it.

The West Europeans, in general, had a stronger preference for negotiation. They also perceived development and education as key to stopping the breeding ground for terrorism, whereas the U.S. inclined towards military solutions that humiliates the Islamic world and invites radical Islamists to seek counter-humiliation. The results are well known. Dealing with the Middle East, i.e. with the European neighborhood, is where the U.S. and Western Europe have been most consistently divided over the last thirty years, and where the Atlantic Alliance has suffered a total crash. The U.S. involvement in this region, from the backing of the Shah from the fifties to the seventies to the arming of Saddam in the eighties, from the rather one-sided backing of Israel even in the face of near-complete adversity of the U.N. to the extension of the “War on Terror” upon Iraq, has been, so far, featured by few successes and numerous disastrous failures. U.S. political and military options have constantly overshadowed West European efforts to bring peace to this region by dialogue and aid for development. Yet since both the United States and Europe are vitally interested in the stability and the oil of the region, there is still hope that they might find a consensus on the peace process in the future.

Conclusion

The conference has succeeded in bringing together scholars from both sides of the Atlantic, and highlighted the intricate interrelationships between security and economic relations, domestic pressures and foreign policy, and the role of the Middle East in the transatlantic partnership during the seventies on the basis of multi-archival studies. While the second half of the 1970s still leaves many questions unanswered, the long-term perspective and a number of newly declassified documents have undoubtedly rendered new insights that go far beyond what can be revealed in this brief summary. The conference has underlined the West European preference for multilateral frameworks both as a means to influence the United States or defuse bilateral conflicts with the U.S. Several initiatives taken by European governments and examined during the course of this conference underline this trend. On the other hand, the U.S. government, unfortunately, seems to change its policies more often due to particular domestic pressures rather than because of what the Allies deem necessary. While the Europeans had some success in exercising leadership jointly with the United States, West European governments, on the whole, were generally much more open to mutual influence and coordination than Washington. This was due, in part, to the rise of a European culture of constant consultation which arose in this phase of the process of European integration. U.S. leaders during the seventies were not directly a part of this new culture, on the contrary, they were often overwhelmed with the centralization of executive power and expected to be able to dominate and influence their Allies by sheer gravitas, either because of Cold War traditions or personal inclinations. In such a perspective consultations were more a kind of a one-way street, where Washington wanted to give directions, and others should listen or may ask questions. Any change of pattern, any agency by others like De Gaulle or Brandt, seemed awkward to Washington's leaders. During détente, the old ways didn't quite work anymore. But with the double-track decision, NATO still proved resilient enough to achieve one major success which, in hindsight, paved the way to the end of the Cold War.

This summary strives to adequately reflect the views of the paper-givers quoted, but ultimately it presents the conclusions of the co-convenor signing here. A book publication is envisaged and will render a fuller picture of the multi-faceted story of transatlantic relations from the Nixon to the early Reagan years.

The conference was supported by The German Historical Institute, Washington D.C., The German Academic Exchange Service [DAAD], New York, The College of Arts & Science, The Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, The Center for European Studies, The Chancellor's Office for Public Affairs, The Department of History, and The Department for Political Science at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.

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[1] Compare Pascaline Winand, *Eisenhower, Kennedy and the United States of Europe*, Basingstoke 1993; Matthias Schulz, "Die politische Freundschaft Jean Monnet – Kurt Birrenbach, die Einheit des Westens und die 'Präambel' zum Elysée-Vertrag von 1963", in: Andreas Wilkens (ed.), *Interessen verbinden: Jean Monnet und die europäische Integration der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Bonn 1999, p. 299-328; Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States and the Atlantic Alliance*, Lanham 2001; Jeffrey Glen Giauque, *Grand Designs and Visions of Unity: The Atlantic Powers and the Reorganization of Western Europe, 1955–1963*, Chapel Hill, London 2002.

[2] Monnet at the occasion of the conferral of the Freedom Award by President John F. Kennedy, Jan. 23, 1963 in New York. Speech attached to letter by Monnet to Birrenbach, Febr. 1, 1963, Archiv für christlich-demokratische Politik, Personal Papers of Birrenbach, I-433-51/51, and Matthias Schulz, "Vom Atlantiker zum Europäer? Helmut Schmidt, deutsche Interessen und die europäische Einigung", in: Mareike König and Matthias Schulz (eds.), *Die Bundesrepublik und die europäische Einigung 1949–2000: Politische Akteure, gesellschaftliche Kräfte und internationale Erfahrungen*, Stuttgart 2004, p. 185-220.

[3] In the war on Iraq and the subsequent occupation, between 14.000 and 16.000 Iraqis have died as of Oct. 31, 2004. See the homepage of Iraqi Body Count, a volunteer organization of British and American academics and researchers, <http://www.iraqbodycount.net/>.

[4] See Max Kaase/Andrew Kohut, *Estranged friends? The Transatlantic Consequences of Societal Change*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1996, p. 55. For more on social transformation and foreign policy, see Norman J. Ornstein/Mark Perlmann (eds.): *Political Power and Social Change: The United States Faces a United Europe*. Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1991; Thomas Steven Molnar, *The Emerging Atlantic Culture*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, c1994.

[5] See for a full report about Odom's keynote lecture Chad Burchard, "Leading critic of Iraq war speaks at Vandy", in: *The Vanderbilt Hustler*, Sept. 20, 2004 (http://www.vanderbilthustler.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2004/09/20/414e40d3762d0?in_archive=1).

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Empfohlene Zitierweise / recommended citation style:

AHF-Information. 2004, Nr.088
URL: <http://www.ahf-muenchen.de/Tagungsberichte/Berichte/pdf/2004/088-04.pdf>