Transatlantic relations in the Johnson and Nixon eras:

The crisis that didn't happen – and what it suggests about the one that did.[1]

Transatlantic relations were going through a deeply troubled phase in the mid-1960s. On this bald fact most contemporary observers and historians seem to be able to agree. There is, furthermore, a degree of consensus – again between both those who lived through the era and those who have studied it more recently - that this malaise reflected the profound differences between the situation in the late 1940s when the Atlantic relationship had first been institutionalised and the conditions which prevailed two decades later. An alliance, partnership or even 'empire' born at a time of US nuclear monopoly, near total American economic dominance, deep and generalised Western anxiety vis-à-vis Stalinist Russia, and a widespread agreement amongst foreign policy-making elites on both sides of the Atlantic that the fate of Europe was central to the unfolding cold war, struggled to adapt to a world of approaching nuclear parity between the two superpowers, dramatic European economic recovery, the steady rise of East-West détente, and growing US preoccupation with South East Asia seemingly at the expense of Europe. The awkward reality that article 13 of the North Atlantic Treaty also identified 1969 – or NATO's 20th anniversary – as the first point when any signatory of the Treaty could voluntarily withdraw from the Alliance added a further destabilizing ingredient to the mix.[2]

Beneath this consensus that there was indeed a problem in Transatlantic relations, there also lurks an element of contradiction, however. This reflects, on the one hand, the growing body of archival evidence which demonstrates that many of the trends which are normally associated with the reassessment of US-European relations which is said to have occurred during Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger's period in charge of US foreign policy were evident within the Johnson administration also. And on the other, the emerging consensus in the historical literature that Lyndon B. Johnson's European policy

[1] The author would like to thank all of those who participated in the discussions at the Tampere conference for their help in sharpening up the argument of this paper and Dr James Ellison for his perceptive and attentive reading of the text.

[2] The Treaty text can be found at http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/treaty.htm (accessed October 6, 2008).

was much less 'inactive' and far more successful than had often been claimed. Certainly the Johnson administration managed to avoid a major Transatlantic crisis in the later 1960s. Many of the ingredients for a crisis were present, and some dramatic disruption of Transatlantic relations was repeatedly predicted in the second half of the decade. But contrary to expectations, no major storm occurred.

Investigating this crisis that did not happen has the additional merit of throwing up some useful leads to follow when looking in more detail – as multiple scholars are currently doing - at the crisis that did, namely the much more turbulent phase of Transatlantic relations associated with the middle years of the Nixon administration. For this article will suggest that some of the factors on the European side at least which helped avert serious trouble in the 1960s, had gone into reverse by the 1970s and may hence help explain why the Nixon-Kissinger years were as problematic for Transatlantic relations as they are generally held to have been.

There could be trouble ahead…

The obvious starting point for this article is to recall how much talk there was about Transatlantic drift in the mid to late 1960s. At one level, of course, such mutterings were as old as the Atlantic Alliance itself. Even in the period of maximum European dependence on the United States (in both economic and security terms) some voices on both sides of the Atlantic had been raised against the development of close ties. Such dissent had only grown as Western Europe rediscovered a degree of confidence and prosperity and started to feel less bound to follow Washington's lead. European misgivings were also heightened by the rapidly changing military and technological balance of power in the cold war. There had thus been a well-documented surge in European misgiving about the reliability of the US in the wake of Sputnik.[3] There had been another after the Cuban Missile Crisis.[4] And by 1964 Henry Kissinger had been delivering a clever series of lectures to NATO audiences analysing the multiple structural

[3] Beatrice Heuser, *NATO, Britain, France and the FRG. Nuclear strategies and forces for Europe, 1949-2000* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 17-8

[4] Maurice Vaïsse (ed.), *L'Europe et la crise de Cuba* (Paris: Plon, 1993)

tensions within the Atlantic Alliance.[5] This background noise had grown more noticeable as the decade had advanced however.

One obvious contributing factor was the unpopularity amongst many Europeans of the United States engagement in Vietnam. Press reports and television coverage of what was happening in South East Asia not only revitalised the long-standing left wing critique of US imperialism, but also generated a new wave of hostility towards American foreign policy amongst Europe's youth.[6] Disquietingly for Transatlantic relations, this was not confined to countries like France and Italy which had deep-rooted traditions of anti-US sentiment, but had also spread to West Germany and Britain. To see the *Amerikahaüser* in Berlin and elsewhere – institutions that had once symbolised the closeness of US-German relations – singled out as targets by anti-American student protestors was an alarming indication of how popular sentiment seemed to be changing.[7]

This left-wing critique was matched by the highly vociferous Gaullist challenge more associated with the European right. The details of de Gaulle's attack on the structures of Atlantic cooperation have been extensively explored elsewhere.[8] What matters, however, when setting out the difficulties for the Atlantic Alliance and the wider Transatlantic relationship is that support for the French President's sentiments was never restricted solely to France, but occurred in small but influential pockets in the Federal Republic, Italy and Belgium.[9] Portions of the right-wing press in all three countries therefore picked up de Gaulle's scepticism about the reliability of America's security guarantee, his dissatisfaction with the unequal nature of NATO, and his desire for a greater European voice in East-West relations. Diluted versions of both left-wing and the Gaullist doubts about the Atlantic Alliance also percolated down into the centrist press across Europe. A succession of editorial pieces questioning NATO's solidity and future

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[5] These would subsequently be published as Henry Kissinger, *The troubled partnership : a re-appraisal of the Atlantic Alliance* (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 1982)
[6] Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker (eds.), *1968: The World Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
[7] Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest. Global revolution and the rise of détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 175
[8] The best English-language study is Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe. De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Allliance* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001)
[9] Ronald Granieri, *The Ambivalent Alliance: Konrad Adeneauer, the CDU/CSU, and the West, 1949*-66 (New York: Berghahn, 2003) 191-227; Roberto Chiarini, 'La fortuna del gollismo in Italia: l'attacco della destra alla Repubblica dei partiti', *Storia Contemporanea*, 3 (1992), 385-424

was the inevitable result. Similarly, de Gaulle's attacks on the basic inequality of the Bretton Woods monetary system and his complaint that the US was allowed to behave in a more fiscally irresponsible fashion than any other state, struck a responsive chord amongst many European bankers and government officials. In Bonn, for instance, anxious US officials touring European capitals in the wake of the French President's highly public assault were given a degree of reassurance that the Germans would not slavishly follow the French but also firmly warned by Karl Blessing, the President of the Bundesbank, 'the US deficit cannot last much longer and we [the US] should understand this. Europe will not take much more in dollar holdings.'[10] It was thus not just the French, nor just student radicals, who believed that America was mismanaging its status as the economic and military leader of the Western world and deriving unfair advantages from its pivotal position. Sentiments of this sort, moreover, help explain why most of the European Community member state governments were initially ready to join forces with the French in the late 1960s attempt to re-balance the rules and institutions of the world financial system.[11] Mutual incomprehension across the Atlantic was present in the financial sphere, as much as in that of security.

Transatlantic tensions were further fuelled by episodes such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty where superpower agreement was followed by multiple West-West disagreements, notably between the United States and West Germany.[12] Not only was the NPT the result of bilateral dialogue between the superpowers and hence something which reinforced Europeans' sense of marginalisation in cold war affairs. The fears of US-Soviet condominium in world affairs which would be so much a symptom of Transatlantic tension in the 1970s, were thus already evident in the mid to late-1960s. In the German case, the NPT was also definitive confirmation of the country's prohibition from holding nuclear weapons. It thus emphasised not merely the gap between the Federal Republic and the superpowers, but also Germany's military inferiority vis-à-vis

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[10] Cited in Francis Gavin, *Gold, Dollars and Power. The politics of international monetary relations, 1958-1971* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 125

[11] French satisfaction with the stance of the Six at the IMF meeting in London in July 1967 is discussed by Garret Martin, 'Untying the Gaullian Knot: France and the Struggle to Overcome the Cold War Order, 1963-1968', PhD, London School of Economics (2006), chapter 6.

[12] See David Tal, 'The Burden of Alliance: the NPT Negotiations and the NATO Factor, 1960-68' in Christian Nuenlist and Anna Locher (eds.), *Transatlantic Relations at Stake: Aspects of NATO, 1956-72* (Zurich: ETH, 2006), 97-124

her European neighbours Britain and France. At a time of growing German self-confidence and awareness of its economic out-performance of both the UK and France, this was a bitter pill to swallow. In the heated domestic German debate which surrounded the NPT, the Treaty was compared to the Morganthau Plan – the US wartime scheme for dismembering Germany.[13]

Such European voices meanwhile were given added credibility by the increasing doubts about Washington's European engagement at the level of US opinion. The most celebrated expression of doubt was probably Senator Mansfield's long-lasting campaign to use Congressional votes to force the US government to reduce the number of troops stationed in Western Europe.[14] But it was a problem which reached well beyond a somewhat maverick senator and affected a much wider portion of US public opinion. When President Johnson met the German Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger in April 1967 he expressed concern about some of the hostility and mistrust of the US which he had been informed about in the European press and then continued: 'While this was going on in Germany there was a similar type of "unfaithful husband-wife" thinking towards Germany in the United States. People were saying to themselves: Why should we continue to spend over a million dollars? Why should we keep on maintaining our troops there? Why should we not let them handle their own defense? They are grown up now. They have rebuilt their countries. They can take care of themselves. They have a better balance of payments situation. Why should we stay if de Gaulle feels we should get out, if the Germans doubt us? Why should we not talk to them in terms of the 20th century, in terms of planes and rockets rather than in 19th century terms of ground troops? If they are looking for defense protection by the French, why not let them do just that?'[15]

Under the surface moreover there *were* real elements of doubt creeping into the Transatlantic relationship, on both sides of the Atlantic. Thus, for example, US Secretary of Treasury Henry Fowler's critique of the 'inward-looking' Community which disregarded US economic interests foreshadowed some of the criticism of Europe's economic approach associated with the Nixon rethink and in particular with Secretary

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[13] *Ibid.* 113
[14] Don Oberdorfer, *Senator Mansfield: The Extraordinary Life of a Great Statesman and Diplomat* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003) 387-91
[15] *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-8*, volume 15 (Washington: Department of State) document 214

John Connelly's approach. In the aftermath of an inconclusive National Security Council discussion of US policy to Europe in 1967, Fowler wrote to the President: 'If the United States is to be effective in partnership with Western Europe and we are to avoid a two-bloc system in the Free World, the relative burdens much be attuned to financial viability. The purpose and thrust of our major political and diplomatic effort much be to effect a more viable and durable financial partnership than our diplomacy has provided in the last decade since the Common Market was established.'[16] Likewise other members of the Johnson administration were increasingly outspoken about the need for greater 'burden sharing' between Europe and America and the seeming trend for Europe to disregard global dangers (notably in Vietnam) in favour of tending its own garden. Walt Rostow for instance commented that 'Europe is neglecting the world. It is in an isolationist cycle.'[17] The gap between the US with its global interests and Europe with its regional ones of which Kissinger would famously and controversially speak in 1973, was in other words already perceived by many in Washington five or six years before the Year of Europe speech.[18]

Likewise, a certain tendency to ignore the institutions of multilateral Europe was already visible in Washington well before the hand-over from Johnson to Nixon. Nixon's failure to make time to see Jean Rey, the European Commission President, when the latter visited Washington in 1969 – an incident which caused a great deal of soul-searching in Brussels – could easily have occurred under LBJ.[19] The latter had been highly reluctant to meet Rey two years earlier, delegating the task of receiving the new Commission President to his Vice President, and had needed to be persuaded by Rostow to make space in his diary.[20] Again therefore a trend later denounced as an unfortunate characteristic of the Nixon/Kissinger approach to foreign affairs, had been foreshadowed within the Johnson administration.

All of this helped ensure that early writing about the period did tend to argue that the Johnson years were a problematic time for US-European relations. There had been

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[16] *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-68*, volume 13, 578
[17] *Ibid.* 574
[18] See Jussi Hanhimaki, *Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 275-277
[19] European Commission Historical Archives, Brussels, COM(69) PV 83, 2e partie, 24-5.6.1969
[20] LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, NSF Country Files, Box 163, Europe (Folder 5), Rostow to Johnson, 23.10.1967

no major blow-up perhaps, but Johnson's mind was elsewhere – whether focusing on domestic priorities or on the ever more preoccupying situation in Vietnam - and his skills were ill-suited for the niceties of West-West diplomacy. Relations with his major Western European contemporaries had thus been generally poor: the LBJ-Wilson rapport was distant and cool compared with that between Macmillan and Kennedy, while the Texan President's handling of Ludwig Erhard, the German Chancellor, had contributed significantly to the latter's fall from power in 1966. Relations with de Gaulle, which would always have been problematic, were meanwhile made even more difficult by the total lack of cultural understanding between the two men.[21] Lawrence Kaplan's book on NATO would be a typical example of this trend. Recently, however this viewpoint has been stood on its head. The dominant view of recent scholarly literature on Transatlantic relations in the later 1960s has been that LBJ was much less ineffective when it came to Europe than has normally been asserted.

The revisionism on this began with Schwartz's book *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam*. This did its best to demonstrate that LBJ neither ignored, nor mishandled relations with his European allies. The links with Germany and Britain continued to be quite intensive and generally cordial, and the French problem, while certainly not solved, was at least contained and prevented from infecting the Atlantic alliance more widely.[22] The trend continued with Andreas Wenger's work on the Harmel exercise, which again painted a picture of US activism and effectiveness on this issue at odds with the traditional caricature.[23] Andrew Priest's study of Anglo-American relations chimed in with much the same conclusion, while Hubert Zimmermann's detailed study of the off-set issue, while illustrating quite how fraught these negotiations proved to be, ultimately presented them as an obstacle that was overcome, rather than one which did lasting damage to US-German relations.[24] And this

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[21] See de Gaulle's comments cited in Alain Peyrefitte, *C'était de Gaulle*, vol. 2 (Paris: Fayard, 1997), p.61
[22] Thomas A. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe : in the shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003)
[23] 'Crisis and Opportunity: NATO's Transformation and the Multilateralization of Détente, 1966-1968', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 6/1 (2004), 22-74
[24] Andrew Priest, *Kennedy, Johnson and NATO : Britain, America and the dynamics of alliance 1962-68* (London: Routledge, 2006); Hubert Zimmermann, *Money and Security: Troops, Monetary Policy, and West Germany's Relations with the United States and Britain, 1950-1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

trend has been given its latest, and most convincing manifestation, in James Ellison's very persuasive study in Anglo-American cooperation to thwart de Gaulle. This concludes that 'in their activities, separately and jointly, the Americans and British had played leading roles in stabilising the West in 1967.'[25] Most of the recent research in other words has tended to vindicate Walt Rostow who had written to LBJ as he stepped down in 1969 to compliment him on leaving NATO 'in extremely good shape for your successor, given de Gaulle, Vietnam, balance of payments, etc'.

Furthermore, this historical judgement is borne out by the actual record of events in the later 1960s which does not really provide much evidence of any serious breakdown at a Transatlantic level. On the contrary, de Gaulle's challenge had been countered and turned to NATO's advantage through the Harmel exercise. The alliance seemed genuinely to have reinvented itself and was actively exploring its new détente vocation and plotting a joint response to persistent Eastern Bloc calls for a European Security conference. No country would hence avail itself of the twenty year abrogation clause which had been included in the original 1949 North Atlantic Treaty. Relations also remained strong between the US and the EEC, the Six having not only proved capable of delivering an acceptable conclusion of the Kennedy Round, but also of complying with the subsequent US request to speed up the implementation of the trade accord.[26] The ongoing closeness of ties between the European Commission and Washington had also been seemingly confirmed by the GATT negotiations.[27] And the Bretton Woods system, while still unreformed, had a least temporarily weathered the storms of 1968 and 1969.[28] European support for the US dollar reached its apogee with the Blessing Note of March 1967 in which the President of the Bundesbank undertook not to seek to convert Germany's substantial dollar holdings into gold. But even after this seeming

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[25] James Ellison, *The United States, Britain and the Transatlantic crisis : rising to the Gaullist challenge, 1963-68* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007)

[26] The most detailed study of the Kennedy Round is Lucia Coppolaro, 'Trade and Politics across the Atlantic: the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United States of America in the GATT Negotiations of the Kennedy Round (1962-1967)', PhD thesis, European University Institute, Florence, 2006; see also Thomas Zeiler, *American Trade and Power in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). For the Community's decision to accept the subsequent US request for faster implementation, Council of Ministers Archives, Brussels, R/753/68, Council Minutes, 9.4.1968

[27] Piers Ludlow, 'The Emergence of a Commercial Heavy-Weight: the Kennedy Round and the European Community in the 1960s', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 18/2 (2007), 356-7

[28] Few contemporary observers would have accepted Gavin's judgement that the 1968 crisis marked 'the end of Bretton Woods'. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars and Power*, chapter 7

demonstration of German strength and US weakness (which in fact did little more than make more widely known a pattern of German behaviour towards the United States which had prevailed since the early 1960s) none but the French mounted a very systematic challenge to the dollar's leading role. And the French found themselves steadily less able to corral the Six into a unified bloc in 1967-8 as their parallel disagreements with their European 'partners' over other subjects proliferated.[29]

So why was there no crisis? Why were all the doom-mongers – but also those more dispassionate analysts who discerned deep structural difficulties in a partnership forged during the high point of the cold war, but now exposed to the very different stresses and strains of détente – wrong (or at least premature) in their pessimism?

Part of the answer doubtless lies on the American side and the nature of the LBJ approach. This is a field which the present author intends to explore over the next few years, but about which he still knows far too little yet to venture very much by way of an explanation. But this article will also contend that there were a number of factors on the European side which contributed to the crisis that did not happen (and the disappearance of which hence contributed to the one that did during the Nixon-Kissinger era). And it is hence on these European elements in the overall answer that the rest of this contribution will dwell.

The first European ingredient which helped prevent a major breakdown in Transatlantic relations from occurring during the Johnson years was the perversely unifying effect of de Gaulle. The French President certainly wanted to be seen as someone who was seeking to weaken the solidity of the Atlantic Alliance and of the US leadership role in Europe. He was also regarded by his contemporaries, and has been treated by most historians, as a genuine threat to the Atlanticist status quo. But in many ways the extremism of the positions which he adopted towards the Americans and the tactlessness which he displayed towards his potential allies elsewhere in Europe repelled these last and drove them back towards Washington. The would-be liberator of Europe from the US yoke, may in effect, have helped consolidate rather than weaken Transatlantic ties.

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[29] Garret Martin, '"Grandeur et dépendences": the dilemmas of Gaullist foreign policy, September 1967 to April 1968' in N. Piers Ludlow (ed.), *European Integration and the Cold War:* Ostpolitik/Westpolitik *1965-1973* (London: Routledge, 2007), 43-49

In the nuclear field, de Gaulle's relentless attacks on US strategic doctrine and the reliability of the American guarantee, confronted those who were genuinely interested in the development of a European nuclear force, with an increasingly stark choice between a very powerful and fully extent US nuclear umbrella, and a putative and much less powerful French *force de frappe*. No serious military analyst could recommend the latter over the former. In Germany, for instance, that minority who were genuinely tempted by the idea of transforming the French nuclear force into a genuinely independent European deterrent, found it hard to overcome the widespread awareness that Paris could offer little more than what was condescendingly dubbed a 'Sahara-Bömbchen' – a diminutive bomb tested in the North African desert.[30] Choosing this 'little bang' as Erhard put it, over the US' 'big bang', made very little sense.[31]

Politically, the French leader's high-handed manner convinced most of his would-be partners that any European cooperation in which they participated would not be European cooperation at all, but simply the replacement of US leadership with French leadership. And again powerful and distant Washington, for all its flaws, was a distinctly preferable alternative to a France which was arrogant, tactless, and actually not really very powerful at all. And economically de Gaulle's overstated campaign against the Bretton Woods system turned what might have become a genuinely prescient European critique of both US fiscal irresponsibility *and* the asymmetry of the international monetary system, into a rant with which few other Europeans wanted to be closely associated. The notion of returning to a reliance on gold as the central pivot of the system also gave unintentional force to the standard anti-Gaullist line that the French President was a backward looking statesman whose views were more appropriate for the nineteenth century than the twentieth. Furthermore, when the French did moderate their viewpoint somewhat and managed to persuade their partners to join them on a concerted quest to lessen the perceived under-representation of Europe in the IMF and the other Bretton Woods institutions, Paris then undermined the collective effort by picking new fights with its monetary allies over unrelated issues like British EEC membership.[32]

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[30] Cited in Benedikt Schoenborn, *La mésentente apprivoisée. De Gaulle et les Allemands, 1963-1969* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), p.73
[31] *Ibid.* p.163
[32] Martin, '"Grandeur et dependences"', 43-49

De Gaulle's overall effect was hence to drive many of those Europeans who harboured genuine misgivings about certain aspects of US leadership and the Atlantic system, back into the arms of the Americans. As one Italian diplomat would put it in early 1963 (straight after the first Gaullist crisis hit Europe), 'Il padrone più ricco e più lontano è sempre il migliore.' (The best boss is always he who is richest and further away.)[33] And this judgement would persist until 1969. France was just too close and too threadbare a pretender seriously to challenge US dominance.

A second important, if unintentional, stabilising factor was the non-appearance of any form of European political unity. Washington always claimed that it supported the notion of Western Europe developing a greater degree of political as well as economic unity. Kennedy's ringing 'declaration of interdependence' speech in Philadelphia on July 4, 1962 asserted, for instance:

> We do not regard a strong and united Europe as a rival but as a partner. To aid its progress has been the basic object of our foreign policy for 17 years. We believe that a united Europe will be capable of playing a greater role in the common defense, of responding more generously to the needs of poorer nations, of joining with the United States and others in lowering trade barriers, resolving problems of commerce, commodities, and currency, and developing coordinated policies in all economic, political, and diplomatic areas. We see in such a Europe a partner with whom we can deal on a basis of full equality in all the great and burdensome tasks of building and defending a community of free nations.[34]

And for some at least, especially in the State Department, this was almost certainly sincere.[35] But as some perceptive US observers recognised the actual appearance of a structure which might coordinate the stance of European countries could pose serious questions about the existing Transatlantic relationship. As Lawrence Kaplan put it in early 1965: 'we would be concerned if any such negotiation weakened rather than strengthened NATO, were to lead to an inward-orientated "small Europe" with the characteristic of excluding the British for all time, did not promote European integration

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[33] Cited by Leopoldo Nuti, *Gli Stati Uniti e l'apertura a sinistra. Importanza e limiti della presenza americana in Italia* (Rome: Laterza, 1999), p.577

[34] The text of the speech is available at http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/003POF03IndependenceHall07041962.htm (accessed 7.10.2008)

[35] For a discussion of the divide between 'Europeanists' and 'Atlanticists' within US foreign policy making circules, see Pascaline Winand, *Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the United States of Europe* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993) 194-201

by strengthening the existing Communities, and if they ignored the crucial collateral policy of Atlantic partnership.'[36]

Throughout the 1960s the European desire for such a structure seldom disappeared entirely. The well-known Fouchet Plan of 1961 (itself a formalisation of French ideas expressed as early as 1959) was thus followed by multiple German, Italian and Belgian calls for greater foreign policy coordination during the mid-1960s, tentative British plans for reviving the Fouchet Plan as an anti-de Gaulle weapon in 1968, and a short-lived attempt pioneered by Harmel in 1969 to use the seven-nation Western European Union for this purpose.[37] But none of these ventures ever got off the drawing board. As a result, for the duration of the 1960s, the US never had to contend with a coordinated European stance on any political issues - in marked contradistinction to trade matters and to a lesser extent monetary issues where such coordination occurred and did have a serious impact upon the Transatlantic balance of power.

Even an increasingly distracted America, more concerned with events in South East Asia than with a seemingly stable Europe, had more than enough clout and diplomatic savvy to dismiss unilateral foreign policy moves by individual European states. The meagre results of the multiple European attempts to mediate in the Vietnam War during the 1960s bear testament to this reality.[38] European political disunity hence contributed to the easy continuation of US leadership and also, therefore, to the stability of the Atlantic Alliance during the Johnson era.

A third contributing factor was the very slow British acceptance of the status of a European power. Viewed with hindsight, the 1960s can be read as an era when successive British governments gradually came to terms with the impossibility of the UK retaining its global role and transferred an increasing amount of their attention and ambition to the European scene.[39] Indeed even at the time many British leaders were

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[36] *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-8*, volume XIII, 185

[37] On Fouchet see Robert Bloes, *Le Plan Fouchet et le problème de l'Europe politique* (Bruges: College of Europe, 1970); on the mid-1960s plans Carine Germond, 'Les projets d'Union politique de l'année 1964' in Wilfried Loth, *Crises and Compromises: The European Project 1963-1969* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001); for the late 1960s schemes, Melissa Pine, *Harold Wilson and Europe : pursuing Britain's membership of the European Community* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007)

[38] See Maurice Vaïsse and Christopher Goscha, *La guerre de Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963-1973* (Brussels: Bruylant, 2003)

[39] John W. Young, *Britain and European Unity 1945-1999*, 2nd edition (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 53-99

slowly and hesitantly coming to the conclusion that their future lay in Europe and not as global power. Macmillan began the trend, Wilson would continue it, and Edward Heath would take it to its logical conclusion in the early 1970s. But this change took more or less the whole decade to occur. The British governments themselves took a while to swallow the full implications. The arrival of a Labour government in 1964 delayed matters for at least a couple of years while Harold Wilson had to 're-learn' the lessons that Macmillan had already been forced to swallow.[40] British public opinion also took time to adjust. And most fundamentally the alternative policy – that of 'entering Europe' – was twice barred by de Gaulle.

As a result, for much of the 1960s Britain found itself in an odd free-floating position somewhere between the US and continental Europe. This was not a comfortable position to occupy and it led to a great deal of soul-searching and irritation on the part of those responsible for charting the UK's foreign policy. But paradoxically this mid-Atlantic position did both allow and encourage the British to play the role of intermediary at several potentially awkward moments in Transatlantic relations, notably that in 1966-7 analysed by Ellison.[41] Furthermore, the non-resolution of the Britain and Europe question distracted many of those who might otherwise have been able to give thought to evolving Transatlantic relations, encouraged the postponement of any serious Atlantic rethink until the European architecture was clearer, and added a further obstacle to the development of European political union, since several countries, notably the Dutch, insisted in what is sometimes called *le préalable anglais* – i.e. the insistence that British involvement was a precondition for any move towards European foreign policy coordination.[42]

A fourth factor was the relatively inconsequential nature of Western European contacts with the Eastern bloc. The 1960s were a time when multiple leaders, from de Gaulle to Wilson, sought to take advantage of détente to show that Europe could still have an impact on East-West affairs. Their collective impact, however, was minimal. De Gaulle was perhaps the highest profile, but while his visits to the Eastern Bloc were PR

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[40] Helen Parr, *Britain's policy toward the European community : Harold Wilson and Britain's world role , 1964-1967* (London: Routledge, 2004)
[41] Ellison, *The United States, Britain and the Transatlantic crisis*
[42] On the Dutch stance see Jeffrey Vanke, 'An Impossible Union: Dutch Objections to the Fouchet Plan, 1959-62', *Cold War History* 2/1 (2001), 95-112

coups, their substantive outcomes disappointed the French and were seen as of little consequence by *both* Moscow itself and by the satellites.[43] The one country which *could* have had a serious impact on East-West relations – West Germany – was still hamstrung by its internal debate about how far such dialogue could go.[44] But while the unwinding of the Hallstein Doctrine was apparent from the mid-1960s onwards and the internal SPD reflection about how different Germany's approach to the Eastern bloc should be was already far advanced, a genuinely effective *neue Ostpolitik* would have to await 1969 and the assumption of the Chancellorship by Willy Brandt.[45]

Meanwhile the other possible way in which Europe could have had a major impact upon East-West relations, namely the engagement of multilateral détente was also impossible until the early 1970s. Serious Western consideration of a European security conference had begun before the 1960s came to an end.[46] But it would take several years and multiple complex preconditions before such an event could open. The area of cold war politics where the US was likely to be most sensitive, namely that of East-West relations, therefore remained something of a superpower *chasse gardée* throughout the decade. A few individual European statesmen did try to get involved. But they had precious little real impact and in no sense disturbed either superpower.

A fifth rather more short term factor might be added to the list in the form of Soviet actions in crushing the Prague Spring. For while the 1968 crisis did not interrupt for long the movement at both superpower and European levels towards greater East-West détente, it did serve temporarily to revive fears of Soviet military power, and hence highlight the residual military utility of NATO.[47] It thus provided an additional reason why the 1969 reform or withdrawal opportunity within the Alliance was allowed to go past without any country making an attempt to use it. The USSR's brutal suppression of the Prague Spring also underlined the ineffective results of de Gaulle's efforts to build

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[43] Martin, 'Untying the Gaullian Knot', chapters 2, 5 & 6
[44] William Glen Gray, *Germany's Cold War : the global campaign to isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003)
[45] For the evolution of SPD ideas, see Arne Hofmann, *The Emergence of Détente in Europe: Brandt, Kennedy and the formation of Ostpolitik* (London: Routledge, 2007)
[46] See Takeshi Yamamoto, 'The Road to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1969-1973: Britain, France and West Germany', PhD thesis, University of London, 2007.
[47] See Andreas Wenger, 'NATO's transformation in the 1960s and the ensuing political order in Europe' in Andreas Wenger, Christian Neunlist and Anna Locher (eds), *Transforming NATO in the Cold War. Challenges beyond deterrence in the 1960s* (London: Routledge, 2007), 237

bridges towards the Eastern bloc. The French President's foreign policy radicalism had already been hard hit by the Paris *évenements* of May 1968 and by the steady accumulation of resentment towards Gaullist France which had robbed it of any European allies in particular. But it was the end of the Prague Spring which signalled most clearly the General's demise as a serious would-be threat to the status quo. This too brought a short term rise in the stability of the Western bloc.

The Prague effect would not last long, however, and all four other factors mentioned would soon go into reverse. Between 1969 and 1971, de Gaulle would resign, European Political Cooperation would be launched, Britain would appear to take a firm (although, as it turned out, far from definitive) decision for European engagement, and Brandt's *Ostpolitik* and the start of decisive moves towards the beginning of multilateral détente would signal the beginning of an important European component of East-West dialogue. This would therefore suggest that when historians seek to understand why Transatlantic relations became that much more turbulent during the Nixon/Kissinger period than they had been under Johnson, they should seek their answer not simply in the changed attitudes of the American government (vital though these undoubtedly were) *but also* in a radically different set of conditions in Western Europe.